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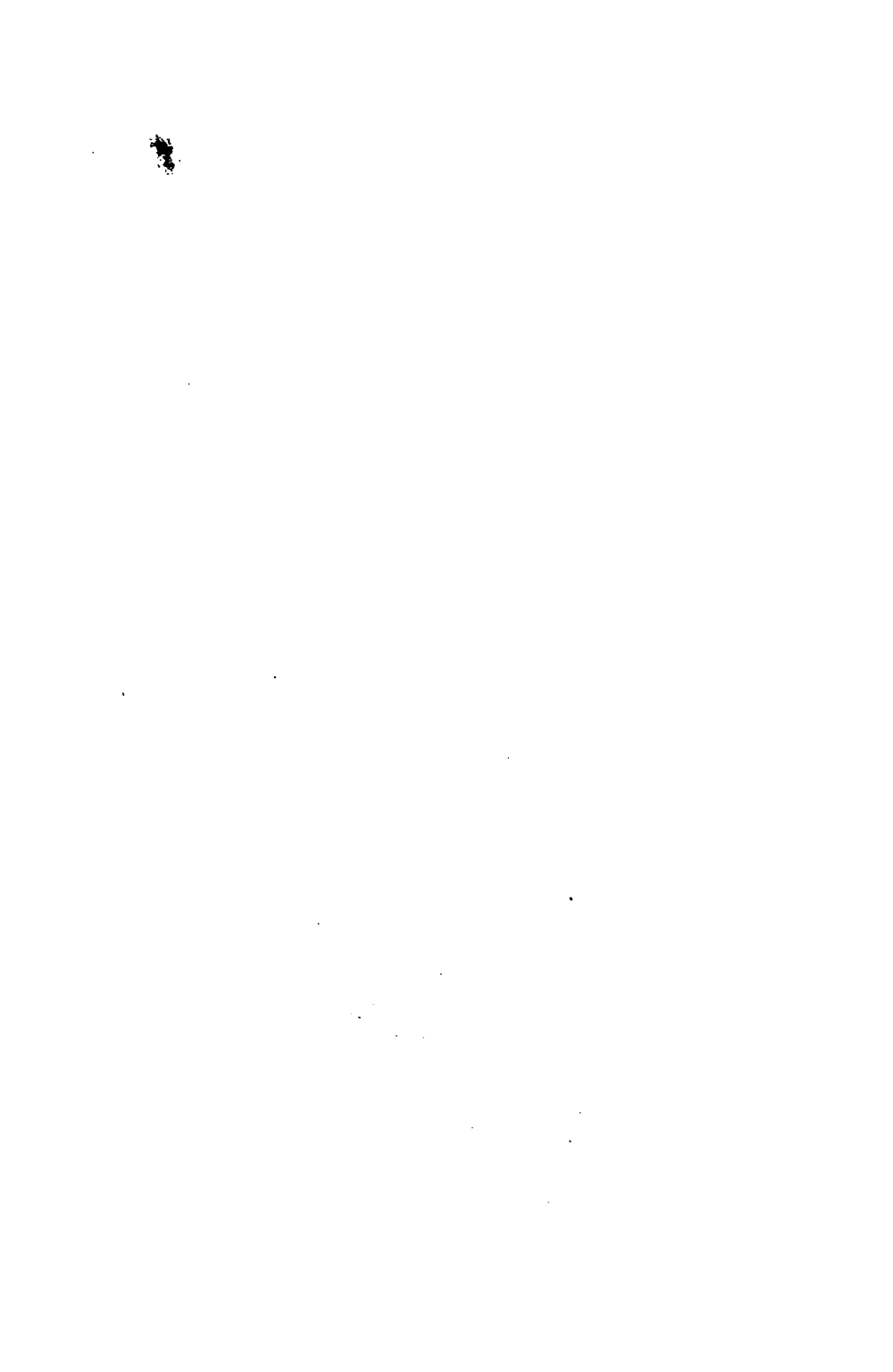




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SHERBORNE.



SHERBORNE;
OR,
THE HOUSE AT THE FOUR WAYS.

BY
EDWARD HENEAGE DERING,
AUTHOR OF "THE CHIEFTAIN'S DAUGHTER, AND OTHER POEMS,"
"GREY'S COURT," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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SHERBORNE.

ERRATA TO VOL. I.

- Page 40, eleventh line, *for* "Domino" *read* "Domine."
„ 193, fourth line from the bottom, *for* "representations" *read* "representatives."
„ 195, bottom line, *for* "be" *read* "have been."
„ 210, fifteenth line, *for* "hought" *read* "thought."
„ 237, top line, *for* "take" *read* "take up."
„ 291, thirteenth line from the bottom, *for* "he" *read* "her"

'The day was "cold, and dark, and dreary," as Longfellow says; but the next line, "It rains, and the wind is never weary," did not hold good: on the contrary, the wind appeared to have been thoroughly tired by some previous effort, and to have sunk to quiescence, as if through sheer want of vigour, or what the

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SHERBORNE.



CHAPTER I.

"Ante oculos errat domus, Urbs, et forma locorum;
Succeduntque suis singula facta locus."

OVID, *Trist.*

It was in the month of November, 1869, that a railway fly, conveying myself, Reginald Moreton, a portmanteau, a gun-case, and a bundle of heterogeneous literature, drew up under the archway of the White Hart Hotel, in the country town of Lyneham.

The day was "cold, and dark, and dreary," as Longfellow says; but the next line, "It rains, and the wind is never weary," did not hold good: on the contrary, the wind appeared to have been thoroughly tired by some previous effort, and to have sunk to quiescence, as if through sheer want of vigour, or what the

doctors call tone. The atmosphere was in that state which, Homer tells us, is bad for shepherds but good for thieves.* A chilly fog—thin, whitish grey, and equally diffused—made the tip of my nose feel a sort of unenlivening tingle, such as one's inner self experiences when exposed to the pride, pomp, and circumstance of some ponderously unprofound criticism. It dimmed the outline of the policeman's hat at a hundred yards distance, and made the approximate gutter an important object by reason of its comparative distinctness. It caused all sounds to strike clearly on the tympanum, and aroused the ears of the mind into a sort of prospective attention. Tennyson says that

“ In the spring a young man's fancy
Lightly turns to thoughts of love.”

But I believe that in the country the abstract idea of good, sturdy British matrimony—shy, home-growing, and often unconsciously heroic—is most practically busy on grey November days, when the air is chilly but not actually cold, and the sheep-bells tinkle softly in the folded turnip fields.

I evolved a theory out of my inner consciousness about that, but I won't inflict it on the

* Ποιμέσω οὐτι φίλην, κλέπτῃ δέ τε νυκτὸς ἀμείνω.—II. iii. 11.

reader now, at any rate ; and as my own fancy was not turning to thoughts of love, either lightly or heavily, we will exchange the æsthetics of the sheepfold for a sitting-room on the ground floor of the hotel, containing two window-blinds of brown wire, a horsehair sofa, a metal urn, and a wine-glass of toothpicks on a low mahogany sideboard, a coloured print of a yeomanry review opposite the window, a round gilt looking-glass over the sofa, a money-box for the British and Foreign Bible Society on a small table between the windows, and a voting card of the Conservative candidate for the northern division of the county on the chimney-piece.

I walked up to one of the brown blinds, and looked out into the street, which contained a large puddle, an unattached navvy, leaning against the wall, with his hands in his pockets, and a bookseller's shop opposite, decorated, as to its window, with engravings of open-mouthed chorister-boys, Newfoundland dogs, a popular preacher or two, and Garibaldi.

I had not been in that neighbourhood for many years, but it had once been familiar to me ; so that I began making speculative comparisons in my own mind as I looked out of the window with the brown blind.

I was staring at that puddle as a dull visitor

stares at a photographic album, or a strong-minded woman at the outside of Mill's Logic, when a voice made its way straight into my ear, uttering these very applicable words—

“Are you looking for bygone days in the puddle?”

Within the next four-and-twenty hours I had thought of several appropriate replies to this address, and had pictured to myself the effect theoretically produced thereby; but for the life of me I could invent none of them at the time; nay, during the next few seconds even surprise was quiescent, having been fairly elbowed away by the suddenness of the immediate demand on my powers of extempore reply—powers which (as the pantomimes always say of the police) are not to be found when they are wanted.

“There is a wonderful force in suddenness,” said I at last, not to the speaker, but apologetically to myself, “a wonderful force.”

“There is, for the purpose of lending an artificial superiority where nature has not given it,” answered my unknown companion.

This speech caused me to regain the power of feeling surprised more quickly than I had lost it.

“I thought,” said I, hesitating, yet much inclined to converse without restraint—“I

thought that to derogate from one's own superiority was considered to be a proof of weakness in these days, when a great thought-maker of the day wishes Christian humility to be codicilled by pagan self-assertion. Anyhow, I thank you for your originality—an old-fashioned thing that struggled hard against Burke's favourite aversion, the sophists, economists, and calculators, and went out finally with post-horses."

"To be henceforth a term of archæology, like Italian singing and good cooks," said he.

"I don't like that juxtaposition," said I, "though it is true, perhaps, of both. I wonder, now, why they ran in couples through your brain. But, I was going to say that you were overrating me just now."

"Two men bowing over self-derogation, in the middle of the nineteenth century," said he, half to himself, drawing nearer to the brown blind, and directing his eyes to the puddle—my particular puddle.

"But what are *you* looking for in the puddle—*my* puddle?" said I, feeling that I had acquired a right to the monopoly of contemplative staring at that lowly work of nature.

"I think I must have been looking to see how much I was altered, that you shouldn't

recognize me," he replied, while a ready-made smile stayed, rather than rested, at the corners of his mouth, and stiffened them as it went.

"How much you were altered! why, who *are* you, then?" I asked, turning round, and looking very hard at him, without being any wiser as to who he was.

"Your uncle," he answered, after a rapid, corroborative glance at my features. "Don't you remember me? Well, I suppose not."

I thought of the African magician's address to Aladdin, and carefully scrutinized the exterior of him who had made this sensational announcement. He was a strongly built, middle-sized man, whose age it was difficult to guess. He had short-cut dark hair, a well-chiselled mouth, with a twofold and unsatisfied expression, thick, down-rolling moustaches, and neutral-coloured eyes that opened wearily.

"Won't an aunt's husband's brother do for an uncle?" said he, with a short laugh. "I feel old enough to be the grandfather of the oldest inhabitant."

"George Sherborne?" said I, half-interrogatively. "But how did you find out who I was?"

"Partly by your voice and manner, which are as unchanged as the eternal laws of self-repeating history and the ever-flowering fresh-

ness of your own convictions and practice, partly by the circumstantial evidence of the brass plate on your portmanteau," said he, mimicking the said voice and manner so well that I could not fail to see myself mirrored in the imitation. But the caricature was not genial, and the looking-glass had a crack in it. I told him so with great readiness some time afterwards. I think he felt that I had perceived this as soon as the words were spoken, for he added quickly—

"I am living the life of a hermit without the hard fare, the praying, or the peace. I mean that one is so bothered with one thing and another—I lamed my best hunter last Monday, and the parson of the parish lectures on botany in the national schoolroom to-morrow. I am fast qualifying for the character of Democritus Junior, and I can't amuse myself like the man who wrote the 'Anatomy of Melancholy,' by standing on a bridge and listening to bargees slanging each other. But do come and stay with me: you are coming into the country, I hear. Haven't you bought a property the other side of Colesmore?"

"A hundred acres, and a square brick house that probably held a sturdy yeoman three or four score years back," I replied. "I haven't seen it yet, but I had a chance of buying it

advantageously, at least as much so as one can now-a-days, and so I closed with the offer at once. It was as much of a place as I could pay for. I should be very glad to come and see you at Hazeley, but I am going to stay with Sir Roger Arden."

"So am I; that is, to dine and sleep, and shoot to-morrow. I am off afterwards to Gorseford, to go to the meet there the next day. I tell you what we will do, if you like. I had to drive in here this morning: now my dog-cart shall take your luggage, and we can walk across country to Bramscote—it's only four miles and a half across Wroxley Common."

I acceded to this proposal gladly, for a walk along the by-paths and crooked ways of a picturesque and well-remembered country, with a companion who left the weather alone, and was not bounded as to his thoughts by the Highways Act, or the advisability of keeping down rabbits, was one of those pleasures whose value rises like the price of corn, from scarcity. I assented then to the proposal, but with a reservation which I expressed forthwith. "I have travelled," said I, "from grey morning till now—it is half-past three—and experienced the magnificent deception of the railway refreshment rooms."

"Insomuch that you require the traditional

mutton-chop of the British inn," said he. "I have got to look at a horse close by, and I will call for you in half an hour."

Accordingly he went off to transact that kind of business in which scepticism is necessary for self-defence. A pity it is that the friendly animal who gives us so much pleasure, and keeps off the doctor, should be made the subject of boundless unveracity; but so it is. Whilst he was horse-dealing, I occupied myself with speculations touching him and others who lived, or had lived, in that neighbourhood; or rather, they occupied me—occupied my mind as a large family does a small house, by filling every corner of it.

The traditional mutton-chop arrived, and I did justice to the same, as a Chancery suit does justice to a property contended for, by eating it up; for I had breakfasted scantily at five o'clock, driven twelve miles over cross-country roads to a station, changed trains a bewildering number of times, and in short, been jolted about from seven o'clock till past two, with occasional intervals of waiting on platforms, where the wind blew from the four quarters of the earth, and placards in large blue letters informed me that the *Daily Telegraph* had the largest circulation in the world.

Then, being left alone, exposed to the silent

influences of local recollection, I fell by degrees into what may be called intentional dreaming ; I mean that state of mind wherein, by an act of the will, we think in a series of pictures with no outlines. That little room, dingy in colour, rather deficient in fresh air, and smelling of soot, referred my memory to some of its archives, dating back from ten to twenty-two years—I am now twenty-seven. And so did the oval looking-glass, and the horsehair sofa, and the bookseller's shop ; ay, and even the puddle in the road.

All these commonplace and intrinsically uninteresting things were a sort of *memoria technica* to me : they brought into my mind by association the plotless life-drama of childhood, and boyhood, and—what shall I call it?—neutral age, when life is fresh, and consequences seem open to persuasion.

How often, when a child, had I been taken to that old country town, and examined all the little commonplace objects in it with an inexhaustible interest that stood its ground even at home among the primroses, and the favourite playthings, and the loved old corners in dark passages, and the little garden, five feet square, filled with mustard and cress, or blue-bells planted without roots. For was there not a mysterious connection between

the local interests of home and that old country town? The favourite playthings had been chosen at the old toyshop, where, in an upper room, a queer little old man, who impressed me with the idea that he had always been the same age, used to cut my hair. That little upper room, with shells on the chimney-piece and odd numbers of the "Penny Sunday Reader" in a green baize bookcase, looked out upon a bookseller's window—even now associated in my mind with "Mother Hubbard," "Jack the Giant Killer," and other sensational literature of my childhood. From that well-remembered window, or from shelves behind the staircase—dark shelves indefinitely mysterious, even more so than the subterranean receptacle for bacon and yellow soap in the village shop—the favourite playthings had first caught my eye. From the bookseller's shop opposite the favourite story-books had been bought; at the ironmonger's round the corner I had chosen the little spade with which I was continually digging up the rootless flowers I had planted, and the watering-pot from which I usually poured water over my own shoes. Then, again, when older, I used to ride into Lyneham, and buy bullfinches or guinea-pigs from barbers in back streets and cads in

difficulties ; and later I came there for powder and shot, just before my first shooting season ; and later still, when I had reached the neutral age of undefined expectation, I came there, on the eve of entering upon the world's perilous ocean. There used I, at the cricket matches, fiercely to despair of cutting out some pompous young squireen in the good graces of Miss Virginia Shale, daughter of a neighbouring rector given to geology. There used I to look small in my own eyes when, at the hunt ball, the temporary heroine of my creative fancy sat down in a corner with a heavy dragoon (they existed in those remote times, and were commonly called plungers) instead of dancing with me. There I came, with all my worldly goods, to start by railway for the long ceaseless battle of life, when I left the home of my childhood, to see it no more save as a stranger.

But in the mean time I have eaten the mutton-chop, and George Sherborne has returned from his horse-dealing expedition.

"Have you bought the horse?" I asked, as I rang the bell for the waiter, and searched my pocket for the sordid ore.

"Yes ; and have not been included in the selling process, I think," he answered. "I fancy I have made a good purchase."

"You are a good judge of a horse, if I remember right."

"Pretty well. I have been lucky in horse-dealing, certainly. I think it generally goes with ill-success in important things. There is that dullest of prozers, Sir Thomas Grub-hedge, a model of mediocrity, who believes in himself so hard that he has made other people believe in him. He never bought a horse that he didn't pay half as much again for as he ought, and he never had a horse worth a ten-pound note; but he causes himself to be considered an authority in agriculture, because he takes everybody to see his steam-plough, and he may safely be backed against the field for his county at the election, whenever he is opposed. In fact, he has succeeded in everything within the scope of his narrow ambition; and I—well! I have been lucky in horse-dealing, but I lost my election at Shipton Clayford through his influence. Yes! A man who is lucky in horse-dealing isn't the man to turn an election by inert force; and the man who can do *that* will never win fair lady, though he may obtain her; and, in short, life is full of incompatibilities. Horse-dealing is a low object of success, but more respectable than betting, and more useful than croquet; yet it isn't a very practical success—it doesn't

save one from loss by accidents. Old Grub-hedge, who never rode over a stick, saves that way. I lose nearly as much by accidents as he does by paying too much."

At that moment the waiter came into the room, and the subject went out of our heads like an out-voted ministry, by being turned out. But it was not the waiter who interrupted us; it was the unexpected entrance of no less a personage than that uncompromising foe to trees and popery, Sir Thomas Grub-hedge himself.

He was a small, compact man, with a bald head rising high at the back, stiff whiskers of a grizzled sandy colour, an outstretching aquiline nose, cold grey eyes, round and rude, a large angular mouth with an immense upper lip; finally, a general expression that is best described as depreciatory. The moment I saw him I felt the secret of his success in impressing the weight of his mediocrity on others. "What a fine fellow he must be if he thinks so little of us all!" is what people in general are apt to feel without being aware of it, in the presence of a stiff, pompous-hearted man, who esteems the measurement of his own self-esteem to be objectively true.

He came forward, or rather placed himself near to where Sherborne stood, and said, in a

prolonged monotone, "Mr. Sherborne, a—a—I think. How do you do? I am happy to see you again. You have been absent some time from—a—oh! ah! by the bye" (here his memory seemed refreshed, and his stiffness unbent backwards into condescension), "you are at Hazeley now, of course. A fine country this, but wants opening out, and better farming altogether. I have just come from my great-nephew, Bertram Fyfields: he drove me over here, and I have ordered a fly to take me on to Bramscote."

"Does Fyfield still go in for theoretical radicalism after his tenth cigar?" asked Sherborne, in a tone that suggested a sneer without exactly expressing it.

The door opened, and a tall, sallow-faced young man, with limp light hair and moustaches, walked in. He wore the last new thing in driving-coats, held a yet unlighted cigar in his mouth, and, like Ossian's heroes, hummed a surly song.

"Good-bye," he said to Sir Thomas, with a joyless laugh. "Don't forget to read that essay on negative religion, and the 'Hymn to the Devil,' too. It's rather startling, perhaps; but then, it's only aimed against the priests, you see. 'Hai vinto il Jeova dei Sacerdoti,' it says, which means that he is a

successful Whalley. He won't interfere with the religion of Laud and Hoadly, of Cumming, Stanley, Mackonochie, and Spurgeon, because it would be more impossible to find out what it is than to learn the Basque language, which he tried at for twenty years, and couldn't manage. Good-bye, I'll give you fifteen pounds for that cob; and look here—there's a trades-union lecturer, Mr. Cincinnatus Ratten, who wants your vote and interest for Shipton Clayford."

He disappeared through the half-open door, whilst Sir Thomas Grubhedge was muttering an inarticulate remonstrance, in a fat but somewhat unquiet voice. The latter took two or three short turns up and down the room, buttoned the top button of his coat with a jerk of the whole right arm, faced us, stood fixedly, with his legs wide apart, and said, in a sententious voice—

"You mustn't take all that seriously. He has plenty of common sense at bottom, and good abilities, too. It's a foolish way the young men of the day have got into—this chaff, as they call it, and making themselves (*he* makes himself out) a—you know, a—quite different from what he is."

"It is a fashion just now," answered Sherborne dryly.

“Yes,—a—” said Sir Thomas; “and—a—the real fact is, you know, he is a Roman Catholic.” This was said in a very fat tone of apology, and the *o*, in Roman, sonorously circumflexed in token of the speaker’s contempt for Popery.

“I never knew that Catholics were more given to chaff than other people,” said Sherborne, abstracting all expression from his eyes.

“No. I don’t mean that,” answered Sir Thomas, placidly believing that the question had been put in earnest. “You see, he is too intelligent to believe all the priests tell him, but his mother, you know— Oh! I forgot——”

What it was that he had forgotten did not directly appear; but Sherborne turned rather abruptly, and said:—“Allow me to introduce Mr. Moreton.” And tacitly impressing on us both his desire that we should do the talking till further notice, left the room to give orders about sending the horse he had just bought—at least, so he said.

Sir Thomas, taking this move for a sign that I should be a congenial listener, approached with visible alacrity, and said, in a voice yet fatter than before—

“Bertram’s father was a very old friend of

mine, though some years younger than myself. He was a Protestant, and so was she. She was my niece, and I was her sole guardian after her mother died. Well, poor William Fyfield, this young fellow's father, had gone in for reading 'The Tracts for the Times,' and all that sort of thing; and a year or two after they married she was got hold of, and went over to Rome. I had rather have seen her in her coffin. He died when this boy was only six years old, and they pretended that he, too, had become a Romanist at the last. I don't believe *that*; but he had been weak enough to let the boy be brought up one, and it gave us a lot of trouble.—I was one of the guardians, and Linus Jones, the rector of Fernham, who had been a friend of his at Oxford, was another—for she wanted to keep him in the hands of the priests; but we were determined to—that is, I was, for Jones would have given in; and he was sent to Oxford, which has improved him; and mixing among young men of the world since has done something for him."

"I see it has," said I.

The ambiguity of my answer appeared to strike him; at least, his eyes opened roundly, and he waited a few moments before he added—

"A fine property, Dredgemere, and he came into it quite clear. You know the place?"

"I was there once as a boy," said I; "but I have hardly been in this country for the last ten years, from the time when I joined the army. If I remember right, it must be ten miles from here on the Middleford side."

"Ah! yes," said he, "of course; Linus Jones succeeded your father, to be sure. I remember your father well."

He took two or three turns up and down the room, and said—

"You remember Sherborne's mother then, of course?"

"Very well indeed," said I: "she died since I left England."

"He's unsettled, Sherborne is," said he. "With good abilities and all that, he does nothing. I often wish I had acted differently, and then perhaps my niece Isabel (Lady Fyfield) would have been different—mightn't have turned Papist. You know Sherborne wanted to marry her; but he was a second son then, and I didn't feel justified, as her guardian, in allowing it. If I had been her father it would have been another thing, and so— Well, well! it can't be helped; but he can't get over it, I can see; and he thinks

I prevented his getting in for Shipton Clayford, which I really didn't do."

"Yes, it is, as you were saying just now, the fashion to pretend to be what one is not," said Sherborne, reappearing at that moment. "I heard a man say last night he hadn't a rap, before young ladies who had a poetical ideal of that financial condition, whilst his rent-roll, present or future, was a silent guarantee for the production of—what shall I call it?—the material support of romance."

"Yes, exactly," answered Sir Thomas, not perceiving the transformation his former remark had undergone in the process of being agreed to by Sherborne. "It is just what I said," he asserted didactically: "you mustn't construe their words literally."

"Nor their feelings," added Sherborne.

"To be sure—that's what I [^said. They *don't mean* what they say."

"No, no more than the atheists and debauchees of the last century meant the French Revolution, which, what they *did* intend, approximately caused."

"H'm—h'm—h'm—h'm—I hope—yes—very bad, very bad."

"And no more than a man would expect, that an after-dinner speech at a non-political meeting will lose him an election two years afterwards."

The red blood came suddenly into Sir Thomas's neatly-whiskered cheeks, and went with no less rapidity, as if afraid of betraying itself by remaining there. Evidently Sherborne had, by chance or design, touched one sore place in his memory. He coloured then, and the red blood seemed to sting the roots of his whiskers; but the instinct of self-respect, which is often a substitute for tact, a bridle on temper, and a finger-post to the external amenities, effaced that and every other sign of annoyance, except, perhaps, a certain looseness about the corners of his mouth.

"You are gaining more than you lost, in the way of comparative dignity," thought I to myself when I saw this, and heard him follow it up by saying, in a kindly tone—

"Ah! you—you are alluding to when you stood for Shipton Clayford. I have often thought it was a pity you didn't stand for some other place. Your speech was beyond the people there."

"Well, we shall meet again at Bramscote by-and-by," said Sherborne rather abruptly. "We are going to walk there by a short way, across the fields, and it's half-past three now."

Sir Thomas's fly was waiting at the door under the archway, and we saw him get into

it as we turned down a by-street that led out of the town in the direction of Bramscote. He wore shepherd's plaid trousers and an unruffled hat; he had the last number of the *Quarterly* in his hand, and his servant had an introspective expression of countenance, as if he were in the constant, nay continuous habit of abstracting his individuality from the notice of his master. I made this remark to Sherborne, as we were leaving the town by a foot-path across a turnip field.

"Ah, yes," he answered with a short laugh, "that's the regulation pattern—it shows how respectful they are."

"Or rather," said I, "how thoroughly they have got into the way of considering their services as the work of a living machine, exactly balanced by the fulfilment of certain conditions on the part of those whom they serve. The very term now creeping into general use, of employer instead of master, shows that the bare bargain is supreme."

"I don't see that," answered Sherborne in a tone rather too decided for perfect conviction.

"You protest too much," said I. "I think you have got some shaky theory about this, and want to take care of it, in order to see what it's made of."

He stood still for a minute or two, poked one of the turnips with his stick, laughed the joyless laugh which had once already grated on my ear, and answered slowly—

“You mean that I am a disappointed man, who is trying experiments with unsuccessful theories, like a chess-player trying an imaginary game by himself with the pieces, after he has lost it.”

“No,” I replied. “That was not what I was thinking; but you have made me suspect that there is both more and less truth in the meaning you put on my words than you imagine.”

“You have grown sharp—very sharp.”

“Not a bit; but when one looks in the glass, one is apt to see other things besides one’s own face; and, as I made myself a special study for several years, I learned something of other people in the process.”

“Well, what do you mean by there being both more and less truth in what I said than I imagined?”

“I mean that, if I am not mistaken, your heart is more disappointed, and your head less so, than you tell yourself. I mean, in short, that your mind is untrue to its natural instincts, and follows artificial ones. Here is a case in point; but I am growing prosy——”

“No, no—go on. It refreshes me to hear

something that isn't paraphrased from what Ranke used to call 'the Englishman's thinking-machine—the *Thunderer*,' whose thunderings have been irreverently called a big, pompous bow-wow."

I was unable to perceive any originality in what I had said, but I suppose I must have looked as if I assented to the idea that it was better not to have one's thinking done for one, like one's washing; for Sherborne, who was evidently in that state of mind which inclines a man to feel slightly irritated at being agreed to without hesitation, added quickly—

"Yes, or from the *Civiltà Cattolica*."

"Very epigrammatic," said I, "but the antithesis reminds me of those rocks which geologists tell us derive their origin from the mechanical force of moving water."

"You mean that the mental act which produced it was forced, washy, and unstable?"

"I do."

"And that, to carry on the geological metaphor, the result is a kind of mental pudding-stone—a conglomeration of shapeless materials?"

"Precisely."

"You mean, in short, that I have a lot of provisional opinions floating about in an ocean of uncertainty, jostling each other."

"Yes, and I might carry on the metaphor further—talk about the process of consolidation, and wonder what it will ever form into; but that would lead me farther than I mean to go."

"That is, it would take some of your pleasantest convictions out of the snug harbour of dogmatism, and expose them to the chopping sea of criticism."

We had just reached a stile; and I forthwith sat upon it, after the manner of my countrymen when they want to be emphatic during a rural walk.

"Now let us make a bargain," I said. "Don't get upon religion, unless you are prepared to give your mind and your conscience fair play; or you may know too much. For, as Dante says—

' . . . Non torna tal qual ei si muove
Chi pesca per lo vero, e non ha l'arte.' " *

He made no answer, but walked on, crossing the lane below the stile, and passing through a small wood on the other side, into a cross-country road, rough and rutty. After we had walked along the lane a hundred yards or so, he said suddenly—

* "Much more than vainly doth he loose from shore,
Since he returns not such as he set forth,
Who fishes for the Truth, and wanteth skill."

PARADISO. *Cary's translation.*

“ You remarked just now (only you went off moralizing about why I didn’t think so)—you remarked that, in these days, servants in general, and old Grubhedge’s in particular, have a sort of introspective way of looking, as if they desired to abstract their individuality from the notice of their masters; and you said, in other words, that the term ‘employer’ shows the exclusive supremacy of the money bargain—the bartering of time, attention, and labour for wages. And I said that I didn’t see it; but, in fact, I meant something else. I meant, that it’s a natural and unavoidable result of civilisation—an inseparable inconvenience.”

“ Showing the said civilisation to be a sort of Penelope’s web, that goes as much backwards as forwards,” I replied.

“ I never said it wasn’t,” said he. “ But do you remember that house up in the corner, with the chestnuts at the back ? ”

I looked at it, and seemed to stand on the other side of a period, in a space of time full of vague aspirations and indefinite sentiment. It was the very house where the young lady used to live who preferred the plunger to myself some ten years before. I used to quote poetry to her in the shrubbery, and be cut out by the plunger at the Hunt ball.

"Well, you recollect, when you were a youngster, how you used to quote poetry to Miss Shale, and give her bouquets, which she, of course, gave to a heavy dragoon—I forget his name—who married her afterwards, changed into an infantry regiment in India, sold out, and became a barrack-master."

"What are you driving at?" said I.

"I am driving at this. As a boy, you of course thought her an embodiment of all the heroines that you read of in Byron and Tennyson during the holidays. I don't at all mean that you were definitely in love with her, but that you surrounded her with an ideal romance, whereas she was about the most commonplace little girl you would have found in a day's journey."

"And because I idealized Miss Shale when I was sixteen," said I, whilst he was hesitating, "it follows that I must talk nonsense about things in general now. You had better say it out, my dear fellow, at once, for I know what it is you mean. You mean, that I have as little sense now as I had then, and that I have proved it by becoming a Catholic. Now, I tell you, I won't answer that; for I don't want to shove a looking-glass before your eyes unless you mean to look fairly at whatever you may see there, which I don't think you do."

“‘Non torna tal qual ei si muove,’ etc., eh?” he answered impatiently. “You are very considerate. Perhaps you never heard of exciting people’s curiosity by elastic conditions.”

“There is nothing elastic in the conditions I named,” said I. “They are as stiff as a poker. If you really want to know what the Church teaches, I shall be happy to tell you, so far as my ignorance will serve me; but if you only mean to cavil and play the fool, I won’t answer you at all. I hope you understand this. If not I will speak plainer.”

Of course he evaded the point.

“I didn’t mean,” he said, “that you intended to entrap me into putting in an appearance as a convert; but the fact is, you know, that unconsciously certain habits of mind——”

“Learnt, of course, from the itinerant Jesuit in disguise,” said I, interrupting him, for my patience was becoming the worse for wear.

He laughed, or rather, gruffly chuckled. The sound had a joyless self-indulgent quality—no, not self-indulgent exactly, but self-relaxing. After a minute he said abruptly—

“What made you turn?”

“I am walking perfectly straight,” said I, looking at him in an unintelligent manner.

“No, no; I mean, when did you go over?”

"That farmer will go over if he drives like that," said I, as a stout agriculturist went by in a "shay cart," steering it in a manner that betokened having done much business at market.

"You are avoiding the question," muttered Sherborne.

"I am; and I mean to do so," I replied, "and for this simple reason, that you are not in a frame of mind to understand the answer. But who is this coming down the road from Ferry Corner Station? He is asking a boy the way somewhere, and doesn't seem much the wiser for what the boy says."

This latter fact became still more apparent as we drew near to where he stood. He was leaning over to listen, and listening with his upraised shoulders, his bent head, his questioning eyes. He was evidently a foreigner trying to make out the provincial vernacular of the said boy.

"He is a priest," said Sherborne; "a French priest going to Bramscote, I dare say. If he is, I will ask him to join us."

"Oho!" thinks I to myself, "what a difference there is between points of view! You look upon the Ardens from the genealogical side, and think of 'old Catholics' in general as of an historico-romantic abstraction; but

you consider *me* from the standpoint of the Papal aggression. Catholics are to be patronized, so long as they don't get into Parliament, or want justice for their poor in workhouses and county gaols; but the indulgence must be restricted to certain families. A certain number is all very well, but they must be kept down, like hares and rabbits."

I found it very difficult not to say this aloud; but, reflecting that I should stultify myself if I did so, when I had declared I would not, and had quoted Dante in illustration, I drew a deep breath, and pondered on the force of controversial obstruction—the most effective, if not the most honest method of verbal warfare. If a man shows that he either cannot, or will not construe correctly the full answer to a question which he asks with the evident design of using his own version of the same against you, he not only puts the *onus probandi* on shoulders that must of necessity refuse the unfair burden, but he entitles himself, according to the popular laws of influence, to assume that the weight of his question, and not the unstable, shifting quality of the principles implied in it, had caused you to decline the undertaking; and if, as will probably be the case, he is not formally dis-

honest about it, you will stand an especially bad chance with him ; for, being honest at heart, he would not commit an act of dishonesty, unless by training, or other causes, his mind had become really incapable of just-dealing towards you respecting the subject in question.

It was amusing to see the alacrity with which his manner changed as he walked up to the spot where the stranger stood. Evidently he looked upon him from the genealogical point of view, and not from that of the Papal aggression.

Whilst he was bowing and scraping in the most approved fashion of international welcome, I profited by the chance, and took a rapid survey of the privileged Papist. I saw a well-chiselled line of olive-coloured features, illumined by a pair of black eyes that emitted liquid light when he spoke, and I made up my mind, from various signs, difficult to define and still more so to mistake, that he was of sub-alpine origin. He wore an ill-made great coat, evidently bought off a peg in some ready-made shop on the British coast, and he had a knitted shawl or scarf (comforter I believe is the word), of thick white lamb's wool, round his neck. His "get-up" was certainly not sacerdotal ; it bore a general

resemblance to the sort of dress often worn by English priests when travelling through their native land, where public opinion respecting them may be rendered thus: "We are extremely—nay, excessively liberal. We have freedom, especially the liberty of the subject, so much at heart that we quite worship it; and that isn't idolatry you know, because—because liberty is an abstract idea. We allow, indeed we insist upon, the utmost personal freedom; but you had better not make yourselves too conspicuous, it might seem—we don't say it would—but it *might* seem aggressive."

And if the reader is not convinced that the feeling herein expressed is one of unmixed friendliness, it is much to be feared that he will be still more sceptical as to the good intentions towards the inmates of "conventional establishments," with which the dominions of his Satanic Majesty have, in this year 1870, been so liberally paved.

CHAPTER II.

“ But loyalty—truce ! we’re on dangerous ground :
Who knows how the fashions may alter ?
The doctrine to-day which is loyalty sound,
To-morrow may bring us a halter.”

So sang Burns in the year 1787, and Don Pascolini (such was the name of the Italian priest) conveyed the same idea in Italian ; for it presently came out in conversation that the Scotch poet’s theory about reversible loyalty had been illustrated in practice on divers friends and relations of the abbate’s, nominally in favour of the *Rè Galantuomo*, practically in the interest of revolutionism.

This part of the conversation arose from the fact of his having asked his way. The wherefrom and the whereto soon developed themselves into details under the fostering care of Sherborne, who looking upon the abbate from the before-mentioned genealogical point of view, seemed to appropriate his interests

for the nonce, as a lawyer does those of his client.

Don Pascolini was going to Bramscote. Sherborne told him that we were going there too, and hoped to have the honour of his company on the way, and was much distressed that there was no conveyance at the station for his portmanteau.

Being a practical sort of fellow, or perhaps only a meddling one, I remarked that this distress might be remedied by stopping Sherborne's dog-cart, which was just coming in sight. Sherborne, with many bows and scrapes, offered to drive the abbate in it to Bramscote; but the latter, being very cold, preferred walking. So the portmanteau was despatched in the dog-cart, and we walked on.

It turned out that Don Pascolini had, for a time at least, left his native place, somewhere in North Italy, where freedom (save the mark!) was manifested by the liberties taken with first principles. His health had broken down from fatigue and hardships of various kinds, and he had been pressed to come to England on a visit to his old friend, the Catholic squire, Sir Roger Arden, who lived between three or four miles from where we were. He intended, as he presently told us, to take the opportunity by the way, of doing

a little begging for some of the starving nuns cast forth from their homes by the ministerial housebreakers of the Revolution.

Sherborne's adjustment of conflicting inclinations, after he had heard this, was, to myself, a curious study, almost amusing, speculatively instructive, perilous to charity, suggestive to imagination, puzzling to judgment, unsettling to conjecture. His undemonstrative excitability formed a very suggestive contrast to the energetic calmness of Don Pascolini.

There was nothing remarkable about the latter, nothing distinctive, as compared with the average men of his calling and country; but, as compared with Sherborne, there was something in him very plainly distinguishable: it was something which commonly distinguishes, more or less, the utterances of a Catholic priest from those of other people, but most especially from those of non-Catholic laymen.

This something has a positive and a negative side: you may look at it either as the absence of an uncertain sound, or the unobtrusive presence of immovable standpoints. Both are an enigma to non-Catholics, and they contribute, more than most of us are aware of, towards keeping up in their minds

the idea of an indefinable mystery akin to that of a haunted house, which popular literature has retained among a people in whom common sense is a noticeable characteristic.

Of the two, the negative aspect is perhaps the most enigmatical, and for this reason—the absence of the accustomed is rather more puzzling than the presence of the unaccustomed; first, because you need only observe the one, but the other forces you to think, and it is harder to think than simply to observe; secondly, because in the one case you have something to lay hold of, whilst in the other you must make the raw material to spin your inductions from.

Now, do people really separate this mysterious *something*? And if so, do they ever in practice look at it from the negative side? I think they do.

I thought of this just then, because the expression of Sherborne's countenance indicated a half-conscious effort to discover what it was that he missed in Don Pascolini—in short, to find out the trick; and if it be asked what happens to a man's features in such a case, perhaps the most pictorial answer would be that they seem altogether upraised, and suggest the form of an arch, as if by a shadow

hovering just below the line of each cheek-bone.

Nevertheless the sentences which made Sherborne's countenance assume this interrogative form were very simple. They certainly were not obscure, but they were prudently, almost cautiously worded; in fact, they were little more than bare answers to questions.

"Italy is not in a pleasant state now," said Sherborne.

Don Pascolini briefly assented, and then was silent.

"It must be painful," said Sherborne. "States of transition are, and must be so very——"

"I came to England on business," interrupted Don Pascolini, with significant decision of manner; "and Sir Roger Arden, whom I knew many years ago in Rome, invited me to visit him at Bramscote, when he heard that by chance I was in England. That is what brings me here. I have also done a little business of a different kind, as I happened to be in England. I have been begging for the nuns who have been driven out of their convents."

"It is very distressing," said Sherborne. "If there could only be some understanding between—between his Holiness and——"

"The thieves who have stolen most of his territories, and want to steal the rest," interrupted I.

"I was speaking to Don Pascolini," said he.

"Nonsense is public property," said I.

"They are doing by degrees in Italy what was done in England by Henry the Eighth," said Don Pascolini.

"Ah!" said Sherborne—by the bye, people always say "ah" when they want to make you think that they sympathise with you, and, at the same time, strongly desire to avoid committing themselves as to principles—"Ah, yes. It's a very sad story."

Don Pascolini gave one quick scrutinizing glance at the speaker's eyes, without turning his own head, and remained significantly silent. Sherborne became cautious—cautious of saying too little. He evidently wanted to offer credibly a considerable amount of indefinite and elastic sympathy for the pillaged nuns. Whether this desire signified latent appreciation of the heroic element in the religious life, or merely marked a phase of international politeness, or sprang out of an historico-sentimental feeling, who could say? Not he, I think.

Well then, he became cautious of saying too little, and he showed it by making ges-

tures of disavowal. Gestures, by the bye, never commit one exactly to consequences. I thought that I had better make him say something distinctly uncertain at once, and not let Don Pascolini be kept wondering any longer, whether his wayside companion was a cosmopolitan finder of good in everything, or a "Liberal Catholic"—Sherborne's words and gestures would have done for either; so I abruptly stated my conviction that the Emperor Napoleon would come to grief for his conduct about Castelfidardo, remarking that his uncle had knocked his head against the Rock of St. Peter, and ended his life on a rock of a very different kind.

Don Pascolini still said nothing. Sherborne tried to do the same, but at length hazarded the remark that the Emperor had to steer between shoals and hidden rocks.

"Which is a good reason why he shouldn't try to steer without a compass," said I.

"Yes—but,"—and here he appealed to the priest—"must not a man choose the lesser of two evils?"

"Certainly, when there is no other choice," answered Don Pascolini.

"But," added Sherborne, after a few moments of hesitation and mental listening for something to say, "the French wouldn't have

been satisfied unless he had given them something to be excited about, both in and out of France. Now the Italian Revolution did for the one, and the glories of Solferino and Magenta for the other; and the one stirred up affairs in readiness for the other."

Don Pascolini was silent for a few seconds, and then said—

"*Sed melius est mihi absque opere incidere in manus vestras, quam peccare in conspectu Domino.* What a beautiful view!"

This was all that had passed between the man of the day and the priest, up to the moment when I noticed that the former was "bothered" by feeling, rather than perceiving, the absence of an uncertain sound in the principles of the latter.

"Are you going to make a long stay at Bramscote?" asked Sherborne, feeling his attempts at reconciling contradictions hopelessly unsuccessful with the courteous but uncompromising priest.

"I hardly know," answered Don Pascolini. "Sir Roger has been so kind as to invite me to stay as long as I can. I scarcely know yet how long that can be."

Sherborne said nothing, but seemed to be debating within himself. The two natures in him tried, like rival candidates at an election,

which should be the representative one. It was an interesting, but not an unusual sight, that battle between the higher and the lower nature, between an instinct of admiration for the heroic, and a cultivated taste for fungous-growths of pseudo-philosophy. The middle way, the tottering standpoint of vested rights based on respectable religiosity, had as yet no place in his mind, or if it had, its place was not on the battle ground of rival feelings, but among the practical conventionalities kept for local use.

Interesting, but not strange, it certainly was, that moral upheaving in which the lower nature rose, and victory seemed very doubtful, interesting because it was a tiny miniature of the ceaseless and variable struggle that torments us from the cradle to the grave, not strange, because it is perpetually recurring, in some form or other, insomuch that, unless we have eyes and see not, we must notice it more frequently than anything else.

I saw the struggle, I saw it in the corners of his mouth, I saw it in the uneasy position of his shoulders as he walked ; and then I saw the better nature prevail unobtrusively. He turned aside as he walked along, took out a pocket-book, crumpled a ten-pound note out of it, and said—

“Will you do me the favour to accept this trifle for the nuns? I wish it were a less unworthy offering—in every sense.”

He thrust the bank-note hurriedly into Don Pascolini's hand, and walked on in silence.

“May God reward you for your charity,” said Don Pascolini.

And then we all remained silent, walking on faster, and all perhaps, thinking of the same thing, but in different ways. I am quite sure that I was theorizing on the nature and durability of the motive which had just actuated Sherborne; I am of opinion that Don Pascolini was comparing Sherborne's words with the specimen he had just given of his actions; and I fancy that Sherborne himself was employed in undoing the effect which an impulse of genuine almsgiving had left on his mind. I can only assert with regard to myself. I read Don Pascolini's thoughts through the medium of an after remark, but Sherborne almost told me what he was doing; and it happened that he did so in this way.

We had just crossed a common, and were descending a steepish hill. Below, at the end of a small valley, formed by a wooded declivity on one side and a gentle slope of meadow land on the other, were the ruins of an old priory. It was at this moment, as it happened, that I

took notice of his gift, and thanked him as a Catholic for it.

One should never praise a person for a good action when he is out of sorts. He pointed out the ruins, and replied—

“Ah, well! Want of food and lodging is an ugly thing. Now these picturesque walls, you see, are pleasant and beautiful to look at; and they don’t get in the way of the Social Science Congress, or interfere with an enlightened worship of the Unknown and the Unknowable.”

“I don’t quite see,” said I, “what you are driving at—whether you have no convictions at all, or whether you take me for a fool, and want to show that you do so. Is this centrifugal fun-poking meant for chaff, or for drawing-room cynicism?”

“For neither, as far as I know, most sapient monitor,” he replied, while a forced smile played uncomfortably about the corners of his mouth, and he began to walk stiffly.

“Then,” said I, “it strikes me that your knowledge in that respect is limited.”

“You think I have no convictions,” he answered, “because I am not convinced by either of two extremes.”

“Namely?” I suggested, and held my tongue in expectation.

"The extreme of scepticism, and the extreme of credulity, if you *will* have it," said he.

"Which two extremes," I said, "meet in yourself, and make a very aggressive combination, like an ill-assorted marriage, or the duet between an octave flute and a big drum in Meyerbeer's 'Huguenots.'"

He waited a few seconds, looked with a sort of interrogative intelligence at the ground, then waited a little longer, and said—

"Well, don't you see, some of us, I dare say, might think it must be a comfortable sort of thing to be able to know what one's religion really is, instead of making one's own private conjectures, and calling the heterogeneous result a creed. But the institutions of the country, my dear fellow, the principles of the glorious revolution, and then the churchwardens, and the people we meet at the cover side, and the parson's wives, and the excellent neighbours who sit with us on the bench of magistrates,—think of their collective *vis inertiae* sitting on a man's influence—eh?"

'The weak attraction of the greater fails,
We nod awhile, but neighbourhood prevails.'

I gave him no answer, which disappointed him evidently. I was sorry for his wasted quotation.

Don Pascolini then addressed some remarks to me, and we entered into a conversation which lasted till we had reached the top of the next hill, when a really beautiful, and thoroughly English scene, opened before us, albeit, the first part of the description may sound prosaic. Meadows richly green and dotted with cattle, turnip-fields dark in the shadow of a November sky, and straight-furrowed ploughland bordered with hedge and ditch of the squire-trap kind, are symbolical, perhaps, of profit, sport, and easy living, rather than any higher thoughts; but then, a winding stream flowed through those meadows; trees, mellow with late autumn tints, appeared at intervals along its banks, and marked the course of a green lane; sheep-bells tinkled in the turnip-fields; the pathway across the straight-furrowed ploughland had a stile that led through a wood, ancient, mossy, and suggestive of primroses; several churches with low towers rose above the thin smoke of stone-built villages; cottage gardens were distinguishable; two or three country houses, with all their appliances and all their records of changeful humanity, were either in sight, or to be traced by a clump of trees; country life was busy in the vale, and the dark blue line of hills in the distance proposed to the

imagination a vague sympathy with interests embodied on the other side, beyond the white streak of light that lay along its edge, stretched out under a bank of cloud.

"There is Bramscote down in the hollow, about two miles off," said Sherborne.

"And the grey gables of Hazeley to its left," said I, "on the hill beyond the clump of firs, and Dredgemere out there, between Bramscote and Ledchester. I can see the trees in the park at Bramscote, and there is the old water-mill on this side, and the village of Fernham, and—the Rectory House: the Rectory House of Fernham, where my father and mother lived—where I last saw them."

And then I turned aside, apparently to take a recognizing survey of the vale and its undulations, really to hide my face, for I was doing what the phraseology of false shame would designate "making a fool of myself"—the tears would, yes, they would come into my eyes, in spite of me.

But I might have saved myself the trouble of turning away: Sherborne was fully attending to some thoughts of his own, and Don Pascolini was occupied in taking notice of the country.

CHAPTER III.

“*Quisquis ubique habitat, Maxime, nusquam habitat.*”

MARTIAL.

FROM the time when I began life on my own account, that life had been, more or less, a homeless one, and especially the last years of it. The first two years were passed in a marching regiment; the next three in vigorously unsuccessful efforts to convert Australian sheep into English gold; the last three had been filled up with omnigenous investigations—not, indeed, to the extent of Hooke’s advice, that people should acquire a knowledge of the true nature of the history of “potters, tobacco-pipe makers, glaziers, glass-grinders, looking-glass makers or foilers, spectacle makers and optic glass makers, makers of counterfeit pearls and precious stones, bugle makers, lamp blowers, colour makers, colour grinders, glass painters, enamellers,

varnishers, colour sellers, painters, limners, picture drawers, makers of baby-heads, of little bowling stones or marbles, fustian makers, music-masters, linsey makers or toggers, the history of schoolmasters, writing masters, printers, bookbinders, stage-players, dancing masters, and vaulters, apothecaries, surgeons, seamsters, butchers, bakers, laundresses, cosmetics," etc., etc.—but tolerably extensive for my small powers. At any rate, as far as limited opportunities and an equally limited preparation for profiting by them could enable me to take a survey of men and things, I had certainly noticed something, and thought a little.

I began this autobiographical sketch with the mental determination that the part of *autos* should be omitted from it, for the events I am about to record concern others and not myself. I may seem to have forgotten my resolution; but it is not so. I shall keep my word in a Pickwickian sense. I am a separable accident, a sort of debased ornamentation hardly belonging to the structure of the story, yet not entirely removable from it, without breaking off pieces thereof. But I shall get out of the way presently.

Perhaps a sensational moralist might say that I took (in another sense than the author

intended) Adam Smith's plea for the necessity of having philosophers to take part in the division of labour—viz., that there ought to be men whose business it is to do nothing, and observe everything. But that is neither here nor there. I only mention those three periods of my life because they bear upon something that Sherborne said—something that a great many Sherbornes and a great many better, far better men than he, have felt, and do feel—feel it stealing over their senses as men feel the creeping drowsiness, so powerful and so deadly, that lulls them into lifelessness among the Alpine snow-drifts.

Those three periods, then, bear upon that something, and this is how they bear upon it.

I had begun responsible life in a barrack-room, and a barrack-room is far from being a home; I had then lived in an Australian hut, which is still farther from being so, when its inhabitant is an 'unprotected man'; finally I had taken to continental life, and that seems farthest of all from suggesting any idea of abstract domesticity to the said unprotected man, for the simple reason that, like club-life in London, it looks more settled down in its unsettlement.

Well, then, as I trudged along down the

hill, saying nothing, thinking as much, and day-dreaming backwards, I stumbled upon this comparative estimate of my homeless life during the last ten years, as differing from that with which all the scenery before me was associated. I can't think why I said it; but I did. I can't think how I could have so exposed a sensitive spot in my idiosyncrasy; but I did expose it, by saying aloud just what I was musing about; whereupon Sherborne—to whom the remark was not addressed, but to Don Pascolini, if any one, said bluntly, or rather with the jagged bluntness of a knife which has lost its edge and tears in wounding:—

“Home! I don't profess anything, and I've lots to be ashamed of” (it is wonderful, by the bye, how popular that kind of vague self-accusation is which implies self-praise) “I've lots to be ashamed of, and I don't go in for fine feelings or infallible rules for everything.”

“Who does?” thought I; but I let him go on, for I saw what he was driving at, and considered it best to get it over.

“I don't profess” (how prosy a man *does* become when he takes the line of aggressive humility to slip in a foul blow at some tender point)—“I don't profess all that sort of thing, but——”

"But you profess very loudly that you don't," said I, for I felt the jagged edge, and could see the weapon. "You had better say it out at once; there is no mistaking what you mean. You mean that the house at the foot of that hill was my home when a child, and till I went out into the world; that my father was an Anglican clergyman; that all my earliest recollections of childhood, with its joyous innocence and incomparable freshness, were connected with the old church, and its low tower, and its Norman arch over the entrance, and with all the well-remembered faces of the old men in smock-frocks, and the old women in red cloaks, and the singers who used to come and sing at Christmas in the dining-room, when the wind had a deep, hollow sound in the chimney, and the bark of the house-dog made a weirdlike echo against the wall of that house which I loved as I never can love any other. This is what you meant, only you would probably have put it in a more prosaic and material way. You would have talked about the Christmas-boxes and the mincepies, instead of the Norman arch and the wind howling in the chimney. But you mean a lot more than this, and I am going to tell you what it is, because it is a pity for people to deceive themselves, and think they

are exercising freedom of judgment when they are in reality the unconscious slaves of worldly interest and human respect, till they mistake a gross prejudice for an objective truth. What you mean is, that the Church of England, as by law established, has appropriated (and so it has, as far as the shell without the kernel is concerned) all the great old avenues of influence connected with all those fundamental institutions of England which, in the natural order, have made this country what she is, and kept her so. Now, you think, though you don't exactly say it, that an Englishman who becomes a Catholic in these days foregoes all those advantages, which of course he does, and takes to a sort of disinherited religion—as Dr. Parr implied when he once said to a Catholic priest, 'You are the eldest son of the Church, but we've got the property'—so that he is not in the position he would have been in had he lived before the Reformation, but in a totally different one, being a sort of spiritual ticket-of-leave man, who is allowed certain rights of citizenship under conditions not very clearly defined. No! It doesn't pay—of course not; and a convert doesn't even enjoy that kind of mysterious respect shown to Catholics generally, and expressed in under-

tones at the corners of drawing-rooms, and shown more demonstratively in after-dinner speeches, when no political concession is involved thereby. But such a view of the matter presupposes either that there is no such thing as objective truth, or else that a man may reject it if the civil power apostatizes. But you mean something more still?"

"Go on," said Sherborne doggedly.

"You mean," said I—"though, perhaps, you never recognized the notion in your mind—you mean that the Catholic Church of to-day is not what it was when it made a new world after the break-up of the old heathen empire, not what it was when it helped the barons to put down the tyranny of King John, not what it was when it identified itself with what was greatest in the distinctive character and genius of every nation in the civilized world. But, my dear fellow, the Church is just what it always was; and now, as ever, it knows how to develope, guide, and utilize all that is distinctively greatest in a nation. With unerring instinct it knows the genius of the people, and probes the innermost depths of the principles that form its best, its most truly national institutions. Perhaps you will say that I am assuming you to say what you have not said, and it is true literally; but

you would never think of denying that you meant in substance what I have said."

"I suppose I did," he answered, relapsing into the weary quietism of a man who has become habituated to holding his convictions provisionally.

"I didn't mean," I said, "to get upon the subject of religion, and I have given you reasons why I avoid it; I was compelled to speak, however, not by what you said, but by what you caused me to feel about that home of my childhood. Do you suppose that I haven't thought of all you could possibly suggest to wound me with, through ignorance of me, of yourself, of everything that concerns what you said, and what you did not say? Do you suppose that anything but the certainty of Divine faith, which a man can trifle with only at the peril of his soul, could have made me break through such associations as those of which that old church tower reminds me? I tell you that I could cry like a child, and kiss the very walls—the stuccoed walls of the ugly Georgian house. I tell you I love that spot of ground to a degree utterly past your comprehension."

"And your father and your mother?" said he in a tone slightly interrogative.

"You know about that as well as I do,"

said I, turning away towards Don Pascolini, who had been left to himself all this while.

Sherborne pulled out a cigarette from a case, lit it, and replied at his leisure, "You are enthusiastic."

He was welcome to the poor triumph; he was welcome to the last word. We were passing within two hundred yards of what had once been my home, and never could be so again.

CHAPTER IV.

“As to the temporal side of the question, I can have no dispute with you. All the beneficial circumstances of life, and all the shining ones, lie on the part you would invite me to.”

POPE, *in a letter written to a Protestant Friend.*

I suppose that most of us have known what it is to see in a well-remembered house, revisited under altered circumstances, or under the emphasizing influence of a gap in time, something besides that which the builder put there.

And I suppose, too, that some of us have sometimes recognized the influence of neighbouring locality in the details of the general impression which we feel, and of the vaguely vivid pictures that float before the mind's eye like moonbeams on the sea, when the moon is behind a broken mass of driving cloud.

I saw Bramscote, then, as the builder made it, as memory peopled it, as imagination, modified by experience and something more,

idealized it. I saw it, too, in connection with what I remembered of other houses in the neighbourhood, and of those who lived, or had lived in them; in connection with their ups and downs, their influence, and their characters, when they had any; and in connection with my own life, its foreshadowings, its beginnings, its developments, its labyrinths, and its clue-threads, its dead reckoning, and its movements by compass. Thus I saw Bramscote.

I ceased to think, and began to contemplate mental pictures, letting my mind rest on pictorial day-dreams, and see in the things before me something more than was physically there.

Yet I do not imagine or admit that there was anything extraordinary in this præter-physical recognition of the well-known objects; for I suppose that most of us have done likewise, when, at some time or other, some circumstance, or convergence of circumstances have emphasized the occasion, hushed interrupting interests, and stirred the depths of bygone associations.

Then it seemed to me, by the way, that it was very friendly of Sir Roger to have invited me, to have recognized the recollection of my existence, to have given me, on the tablets of

his memory, a local habitation and a name, when the habitation had long since changed its inhabitants, and the name had ceased to be heard of, there or around.

"It was very kind of him," thought I, half aloud; and then I walked on, not thinking at all, but hearing with my mind indistinct echoes from the past.

The wind was freshening as the sun went down red and streaky behind the distant hills, and some of those Terpsichorean leaves that Coleridge talks of, when he writes about—

"The one red leaf, the last of its clan,
That dances as long as dance it can,"

fell at shortening intervals from the trees in the park, falling, floating, shivering, and whirling through the fitful breeze. But I did not observe that they danced.

Presently I found myself in front of Bramscote. And a very ugly house it was—a large square building of smooth white stucco, marked out in squares, to look like an imitation of stone. It had long sash windows, a square entrance hall, supposed to be supported by some scagliola pillars, a superfluous superstructure of wall at the top of the house outside, fringed with arms and nondescript mythological figures, so that there appeared

to be neither chimneys nor roof, two long white wings with the same pseudo-classical ornamentation, and a high flight of steps leading from the level of some underground offices up to the front door. Unfortunately, the house had been rebuilt at the beginning of the century, and this was the inevitable result.

Fortunate were those houses that needed not rebuilding then, or whose owners were without the means of supplying the want. Unfortunately for the house that once ornamented the spot now disfigured, it was dangerously out of repair when Sir Roger's grandfather inherited it—dangerously, not to life or limb, but to taste and its owner's balance, prudential and pecuniary.

In those days English Catholics underwent an oppressive toleration, which took from them their quality of martyrs in intention, and left them scarcely an outlet for temporal energy except house-building.

A fly, evidently from the railway station, was just driving away from the door as we arrived. The driver's face wore an expression of fat contentment, which indicated that the willowlike youth who was walking up the steps, followed by a servant carrying a port-manteau, a gun-case, and a box of cigars, had

duly rewarded him for all the elbow-jerkings and bad language employed on the journey.

“The watch-dog’s voice, that bayed the whispering wind,”

sounded a hollow and conditional welcome from the distant recesses of the court-yard behind;

“And the loud laugh that spoke the vacant mind,”

greeted us from the square mouth of a fat man, ruddy and round-eyed, who was communicating his dull joyfulness to a straight-backed youth in knickerbockers and mauve stockings.

We presently reached the precincts of a library, fully furnished with everything—except, perhaps, books. Afternoon tea was “*circulating*”—as a special correspondent would express himself in what is meant to be English. Some fifteen people were disburdening themselves of their pent-up borrowings from newspapers, periodicals, and pompous people. The wood fire blazed cheerily, the skye-terrier wagged his tail on the hearth-rug, and Sir Roger came forward to greet us with a pleasant smile and pleasant words.

He was a tall, upstanding man, well but not symmetrically built, pictorial but not exactly handsome. His figure was rather too heavy

in shape, his features rather too sharply cut. His distinguished appearance and high-bred manners were marked, but not marred, by an indefinable expression of reserve, in contrast with evident openness and simplicity of character.

Judging from the shape and expression of his features, any one cunning in countenances would have inferred—first, that an inherited habit of suppressing his own individuality claimed a larger share in the government of his instincts than his self-reliance was willing to concede; secondly, that the desire to do and to be what his abilities and position required was stronger than circumstances allowed him to carry into successful practice.

Much conversation of a lively but somewhat feeble kind was going on in different parts of the room, not all at once, but by fits and starts that appeared to obey some natural law of succession: for great is the power of the tea-pot in promoting loquacity of that kind which may be said to be its own object.

As a rule, afternoon tea is nasty and unwholesome—nasty in itself, by reason of being weak and cold, unwholesome, because it intrudes upon the digestion's hours of rest. Yet it is a great institution in modern country-house life, equivalent to early riding in Rotten

Row, and, like that clever device for getting through a day without doing anything, helps to fill up the time with unsuggestive chattering, so that the fogies who remember a past generation may have less leisure for thinking that English young ladies had not always the manners of barmaids, and that wit has gradually become a term of archæology.

Strangely enough it happened that, very soon after our arrival, whilst my quality of a new comer was yet freshly impressed on my own consciousness, and in the aggressive forbearance of Sir Thomas Grubhedge, who, with his introspective valet, had preceded us by about half an hour—it so happened that I stumbled on this very theory about afternoon tea in the country, and morning rides in London : only I said nothing about the barmaids, and my allusion to the wit was characterized by an obscurity befitting the present fashion of that ornament, seeing that I wanted to back out of the business as soon as I felt the splash of my tumble into the middle of it. The unlucky plunge was occasioned thus :

Sir Roger was talking to Don Pascolini about some old English gentleman whom they had both known formerly at Rome—or rather, Don Pascolini had met him in Sir Roger's apartments there ; and this, their first

meeting since then, recalled the circumstance to the recollection of both.

“He was a very polished man, and apparently cultivated,” said Don Pascolini; “at least, so it appeared to me from the little I saw of him. Certainly he was full of wit, and very agreeable, both in what he said, and in his manner of saying it; but I think that the men of his day either possessed or cultivated these gifts more than people do now.”

Sir Roger assented to this last proposition inclusively, but avoided committing himself thereto; for it was a rule of his, whether calculated or instinctive I cannot tell, to give weak opinions when the company was formed on the denominational system; and though the comparative wit of the period would seem to be decidedly neutral ground for a party of free-born Britons to air their judgments upon, it was evident that he suspected the existence of some by-paths and crooked ways, leading to discussions in which silence would concede by default, and words would be misinterpreted.

So he answered in a touch-and-go manner, admitting heartily, and retreating with vigour, two or three steps at a time, into the region of generalities. Unluckily, Edward Arden, his second son, who went in for imitating the peculiarities, if not the wit of the period, and

had therefore not failed to catch the fashion of what may be called interruptive or inconsequent talking, stated his conviction that afternoon tea is an awful jolly thing, because people have nothing else to do after they come in, till dressing time. Whereupon a small square man, with an irregularly developed cerebrum, a large organ of self-esteem, and a joylessly sensual mouth stiffened by trained cynicism, looked up from a photographic album, which had received the impression of his eyes whilst he was explaining to a sharp-featured man, clad in clerico-sporting attire, the latent merits of Hindoo Rationalism.

Of these two, the small square man was the absentee neighbour, Mr. Crayston, and the listener, the squarson—a good-humoured man, characterized by a steady love of county business, and an inclination to quote Horace. He failed to see any cross-road leading from the Bramo Somaj to the Thirty-nine Articles, but was not altogether hostile to the theory that it might be a serviceable hindrance to Catholic missionaries. I gathered this by unavoidable eaves-dropping through chance proximity and sharp ears.

Well, Crayston looked up, and delivered himself of Mr. Kingsley's opinion, that "Men must work, and women must weep" (he had

never done any work at all himself), and that, in the present day, people apportion their care of mind and body better than they ever did before. He was proceeding to quote, or rather to adduce Plato in support of what no one was disposed to deny, viz., the advantage of keeping a due balance between the mental and physical powers, when Sherborne dryly requested to know whether the duty of working included the privilege of afternoon tea; whether continuous weeping entitles its votaries to be cheered, but not inebriated, by the use *à discretion* of that soothing herb; and, finally, whether our more practical apportionment of time could fairly be gathered from the brief career of the three fishers; “for,” said he, with a sustained gravity which took in half his hearers, and put out the person addressed, “you see, in the first place, the men were drowned, and the women left chargeable to the parish—a moral quite contrary to all sound principles of political economy—Malthus would have abhorred the notion; secondly, from the next line, ‘and the sooner ’tis over, the sooner to sleep,’ it is evident that the working and weeping are not meant to be permanent institutions, but temporary expedients with a common end in view, which is—to do nothing.”

Before Crayston had time to gather up in his mind the materials for an answer, Sir Thomas Grubhedge, who cultivated perceptive obtuseness under the disguise of common-sense, put forth his opinion, that if the fishermen "were drowned whilst labouring to get an honest living, it was only just that the parish should support their families."

"But how about Malthus and nature's banquet?" said Sherborne. "People must show their tickets, you know, or go without, he says—or somebody else does."

"But you were speaking of work, I think," said Sir Roger, making a reckless plunge—he hardly cared whither, in his anxiety to be rid of that awkwardly suggestive subject.

"And the balance of power between brain and muscle," interrupted Sherborne. "I believe Crayston thinks that if it were not for the swinging gallop before luncheon, and the invigorating sensation of seeing pigeons shot at Hurlingham, and the dancing and banquetting at all hours, from four o'clock in the day to four o'clock in the morning, the girl of the period would become too much spiritualized by the light literature, or philosophy teaching by examples."

"Which, by the bye, was said of history, not of novels, while you are about it," said Crayston.

"All right," answered Sherborne. "Did you get that from a book of quotations, or from——?"

"Where?" said Crayston, who knew the value of an interrupted question in weakening the force of the interrupted one. But Sherborne was equal to the occasion, and made the suggestive reply—

"You know best. It comes from where you found it."

"A pretty sort of philosophy they would get out of the novels of the day," said Grub-hedge, who had followed the conversation after the manner of blind-man's-buff.

"Philosophy—eh?" said Edward Arden, who remembered nothing about the same except the rooms he had inhabited at college while supposed to be studying it. "I never could see the pull of philosophy—not I."

He uprose to the full height of a figure that could only be described by the homely but time-honoured simile of a thread-paper, and, digging his hands into the pockets of his knickerbockers, essayed to put forth a joke, but got no farther than a shake of the head, a rounding of the eyes, and an upraising of the eyebrows. Then he repeated his conviction that tea before dinner was a jolly thing, because it filled up the time; and then

I said (when appealed to) that it did, and that so did all the other jolly things just referred to by Sherborne, and that fillings up are not made up of the soundest materials. And then it suddenly occurred to me that I had not meant to say this, and I wondered why I had done so.

And then there was a break in the talking, as if by general consent, the demand and the supply appearing to stop all at once; and then there was a hesitation, a move, and a mustering of the ex-talkers, after which the newly-arrived guests filed off, under hospitable escort, to their rooms.


"Who is that man you were pelting with somewhat hard *confetti*?" said I to Sherborne.

"Oh!—what's his name?—Crayston. He wasn't in this neighbourhood when you were a boy. He's a great humbug—pretends to know a lot, and doesn't."

"And that young fellow—handsome, and with a well-developed head" (there was no one else answering the whole description) "at the other side of the room—who is he?"

"Oh! some fellow or other—how should I know?"

"And how should I know that you did not?" thinks I. "There is some reason for that. I wonder what it is?"



CHAPTER V.

"We ridicule men of one idea, but a great many of us are born to be such, and we should be happier if we knew it."

DR. NEWMAN, *Grammar of Assent*.

IF concerning England I have one conviction stronger than any other, it is that the so-called Reformation killed the goose with the golden egg; in other words, that it destroyed the source whence her true greatness flowed; or more correctly, that it sold out the treasure from its investment, and proceeded to use up the principal, insomuch that, if the remainder be not re-invested ere long, the waste will be apparent to those whom it concerns, when it is too late for them to profit by their knowledge.

Whether this view (I could wish it were a more distant one, for the more I look at it the less I like it) be a natural production of my poor brain, or was made to grow there by budding, or whether it was self-sown from

elsewhere, like thistles, and had germinated by "unconscious cerebration," is a problem not worth the trouble of solving; for, at the least, I only noticed what is so conspicuous, that one must be blind, or wear coloured spectacles, not to see it. I certainly made up my own mind before I had heard or read anything on the subject—anything, at least, that was not either contradictory of my own conviction, or unintelligible; yet not even in this restricted sense could I claim the invention. As well might every person who has a tooth drawn claim the merit of discovering that the process is painful to the patient, as an individual Christian take credit for seeing independently of others what he cannot help seeing unless he shut his eyes, or allow himself to be hoodwinked by the selfish sophisms of a false liberality.

My conviction in this matter was not likely to sit looser upon me after I had arrived in the county of — than when I lived far away from the land whose local associations confirm them whithersoever one casts one's eyes; and in fact, as soon as I found myself in my room, surrounded by quick incentives to musing—such as the gentle heat of a good fire, some old prints of local scenery, a boot-jack of old-fashioned size and weight, the peculiar broken

silence of an English country-house, and the local scenery suggested by dim vistas through the gathering mists of a November evening—they began to turn themselves over in my mind, repeatedly and in succession, like a shoal of porpoises in the wake of a ship sailing before the wind—a metaphor, by the way, which does not appear to fail in point of fulness, however poor it be in quality, seeing that we are confessedly being borne onwards at a quicker rate than can be calculated except by measurement of the distance done.

As soon as I had unpacked my portmanteau, I sallied forth into the white frosty mists, and strolled about the park, continuing to think on the same subject, and accounting the same to be a business-like study for an Englishman who left England before he had attempted to think at all.

“Ex fumo dare lucem
Cogitat——”

thought I, as I lit my pipe under an ancient beech, and found myself evolving from my inner consciousness, a sort of axiomatic summary of what had been passing in my mind. But this is not the time or place to enter upon so large a subject.

I sauntered slowly on, and by the time I had reached the eastern boundary of the

park, my pipe began to cast up ashes and feeble sparks in my face, whereupon I ceased puffing, and turned my steps towards the house, from the back of which the great bell sent forth its characteristic monotone into the darkness, reminding me that society expected every man to dress himself like a waiter.

“ Well,” thought I, in continuation of what had been running in my head like the burden of a melancholy ballad, “ what next? Society looks different from what it was, or seemed, when I was a very small boy. Social restraints have given way to shooting-jacketism; whilst the honest old bigotry that dozed and trusted within the four corners of square pews lined with green baize, has passed away like a dissolving view at the Polytechnic, succeeded by an equally bigoted indifferentism that resents objective truth as a personal affront. Yet they say there is a vein of earnestness even there—a real desire to find the truth, an unspoken, perhaps unconscious, resolution to accept it when found; and such a habit of mind, it may be urged, is healthier than that which makes a man rest satisfied with a stone for bread—healthier, because less obstructed, and therefore more open to the reception of the Faith. It may

be so, but a sieve too is open, and the Danaïdes are represented as endlessly filling vessels that have no obstructions, but also no bottom.

I had now reached my own room, when, being recalled to the practical details of life by the sight of the smoking canful of hot water on the wash-hand stand, the lighted candles on the dressing-table, and the folded clothes on the bed, I bethought me that instead of speculating about a comparatively new state of things, it would be advisable to see what I could pick up by observation. So I dressed, and presently appeared in the drawing-room, where I found some twenty social specimens for the exercise of such perspicuity as I might suppose myself to possess.

CHAPTER VI.

τοτὲ δ' ἀνθρώπων
 γινῶμαι πολλὰ
 καὶ δυσάρεστοι δέκναισαν.

Iph. in Aul.

A DINNER party in the country has four periods, each with its own special characteristics. The period of prospective enjoyment and self-valuation, before dinner; the period of agreeability and self-manifestation, at dinner; the period of views and self-obtrusion, after the ladies have left the dining-room; and the period of general friendliness, when the carriages have been ordered. During the first of these periods, conversation rarely extends beyond news and elastic generalities, nor did it pass the boundary on that occasion. In London it has, as a rule, only two periods: the period of descriptive apologies for being late, and the period of talking against time, after which individuals and families disappear suddenly at intervals. In London your toes

may be trodden on morally at any time, from your arrival to your departure; but in the country you are probably safe till after the soup, possibly till the arrival of the *entrées*; for convictions of a certain class are susceptible of gastronomic influence, and grow by what the person holding them feeds on.

The Poet Campbell assures us that freedom shrieked when Kosciusko fell. We are not told what it did when, by the Catholic Relief Bill of 1829, all the regular clergy were declared liable to be transported for life. Perhaps it made merry over that sop to certain irreconcilables of the period, shrewdly foreseeing that the threat would probably be harmless. And yet the joke would be a grim one. No doubt that clause in the bill is in itself practically harmless; but so are the notices about man-traps and spring-guns at the corners of woods, in which, nevertheless, the wayfarer will not be welcome, and may be suspected of poaching, or damaging young trees, or loitering about to set a stack on fire.

Now an English Catholic is politically and socially in a position not unlike that of the said wayfarer. He is like a man walking along an unfrequented public path over land which his ancestors planted and reclaimed from the

waste, and where he now lives by sufferance under an unquestionable, though somewhat vague, byelaw of trespass. He sometimes turns aside from the path, finding it muddy in places, and not pleasant, for he has been told that the man-traps and spring-guns have no real existence; and he goes his way, deeming himself on the whole fortunate in being able to pass unnoticed among the pollarded remains of the oaks which his forefathers had planted.

But, it may be asked, what is the meaning of all this metaphor? Where is the trespass? What sort of annoyance *does* it, and what evils *may* it, entail? The answer is, unfortunately, but too self-evident.

By the common law of public feeling in England, Catholics commit a trespass whenever they seek that share of influence, political or social, for which they theoretically have a right to compete on equal terms with Jews, Unitarians, and Atheists. Whenever they make, or appear to make, the attempt, they are warned off. They are warned off the House of Commons by being persistently not elected: they are warned off the inner circle of all public life by the respectful suspicion of the general public, and the prohibitory nature of the demands that would confront their consciences there.

Furthermore, the notice board is fixed at the entrance to the sociabilities of private life; and this was what I felt concerned me most as I joined the mixed assemblage in Sir Roger Arden's drawing-room before dinner. Sherborne had caused me, as the reader is aware, distinctly to feel it during our walk from the station; and I was still smarting from the effort of having to talk to an old friend, with, if I may so express it, my tongue half tied up.

Civility, the suspicions of others, the conviction of being misunderstood in everything that bears, even indirectly, upon any objective truth, warn Catholics in mixed society to keep the foot-path of generalities, material benevolence, local chatter, and, so far as it can be treated superficially, the latest news.

Now, there are two reasons why this is a pre-eminently disagreeable position, and occasionally a painful one. In the first place, the society in which one holds that position, is, as regards one's self, a mental masquerade. Sometimes one is like the veiled prophet of Khorassan, highly respected till one drops the veil, and then taken for—no matter what. Secondly, it necessitates a dilemma which may be thus rendered:—If I am attacked, whether directly or indirectly, I must either

reply, or not reply. If I do not reply, either I shall seem a sneak, or my cause will suffer depreciation. If I do reply, the answer must be either sufficient or insufficient. A sufficient answer must often be, or seem, by the nature of the questions involved, uncourteous ; an insufficient answer will score for the other side. Therefore, do what I will, I must appear in the wrong.

Of course, one must choose the lesser evil, and as it is a lesser evil to be misunderstood than to be caught shuffling, it is clear that one must either reply unreservedly, or unreservedly state why one declines doing so—which comes to the same thing as regards hoisting one's colours.

Can one avert the dilemma by a suggestive reply that will cause the questioner to turn aside from his question ? Just as often as one can do so without showing the object of the manœuvre—how often will depend on one's tact and the obtuseness of the audience ; but as soon as the motive becomes apparent, the movement becomes a worse blunder than answering insufficiently, or holding one's tongue : for the shirk is more evidently intentional, and what is not said is made more conspicuously absent.

It comes then to this : one must either reply

unreservedly, or unreservedly state why one declines to answer at all ; and this reply, or rather refusal, must be worded with a view to showing as much courtesy as circumstances will permit, circumstances which one cannot foresee or modify, and which occasionally leave no room for anything but plain-speaking.

As I soon found, but not before dinner.

Clearly enough, on that occasion, the time before dinner was a period of prospective enjoyment and self-valuation. People talked at intervals, and looked about like playgoers before the curtain rises, and the majority seemed impressed with the idea that there was nothing objective in the world except their own position. We were twenty-four, including Sir Roger and his family. Here is a list of them :—

First, Lord Oxborough, who was, by the way, my mother's first cousin—a good, yet not an exceptional specimen, of Post-Reformation territorialism. He believed in the duties of property, and the Divine right of the Privy Council on doctrinal points, respected Catholics in a genealogical sense, and explained all the difficulties concerning them to his own satisfaction by that much employed term-of-all-work, Ultramontaniam. He had a certain force of character, slow but unyielding,

and much practical common sense, limited in action by the politico-religious necessities of rural Anglicanism. He had well-formed features, enlivened by a cheerful expression of amiable sturdiness; his general appearance betokened a working country gentleman, a quiet fulfiller of his duties, as far as he could see them, and a deserving owner of several weight-carrying hunters.

Secondly, Lady Oxborough, a modern variety of the female territorialist, careful in social self-assertion, careless of what needed none, expansive to fashionable life-wasters and literary bamboozlers of moral sense, systematically neglectful of social ties and the duties of country neighbourship. She seemed, and she was, better in her capabilities than in her actions; but her mind, like a piece of newly-woven cotton, took the print of the "last pattern out."

Thirdly, her daughter, Miss Exmore, and fourthly, a younger daughter. The eldest was about half an inch taller than her sister, and her features were a trifle more marked, otherwise the happy man who was engaged to her, might easily have been put off with the wrong one at the altar of Hymen, and have gone through the honeymoon without discovering his mistake. In body and mind both were as

inexpressive and as symmetrical as a palladian house : there was no physical angularity in either of them, nor any points of character. But then, they were also free from angularity of temper, and they were not fast. Self-contained, and calmly self-conscious, but not self-sufficient, they appeared to derive much pleasure from the contemplation of their own limited theories of good and evil, so that virtue was its own reward by means of a pleasant introspection ; yet they never paraded their limited liability in the heroic, still less did they erect it into a virtue. They were good, as far as they went, and they made no pretence in any direction whatever. As wives, they would probably be attached rather than affectionate, as mothers, attentive rather than careful, in all relations of life, almost obstructively matter-of-fact within uncertain limits, and undemonstrative to the extreme verge of coldness ; but it might, perhaps would, be possible for some person or persons unknown to develope them beyond a standard so respectable and so uninteresting. It certainly would be not only possible, but easy, to go farther and fare worse in the matrimonial lottery ; indeed, that end might have been attained without going farther than Sir Roger Arden's dining-room, where—

Fifthly, between a High Church rector and myself, a Miss Hermione Alberta Crumps maintained a conspicuous appearance among milder manifestations of millinery, and by means of an active self-consciousness, remotely connected, perhaps, with abortive claims of higher instincts, caused her presence to be felt. She was sister-in-law to a neighbouring Anglican vicar, Mr. Linus Jones, who was also present with his wife, her admiring elder sister. He has been already mentioned by Sir Thomas Grubhedge, as co-guardian of Sir Bertram Fyfield, and as successor to my father in the living of Fernham.

This self-impressed young lady represented two characteristics of modern civilisation, in-consequence, and unconscious recklessness. She idolized Garibaldi, and venerated the relics of Toryism, loved the externals of aristocracy, and admired principles fundamentally opposed to it. She was intermittently excitable, rather than enthusiastic, strong-tempered, rather than impassioned; uncontrolled, rather than susceptible; a cultivator of sensational symbolism, rather than a lover of art. She sang, as I afterwards found to my cost, in the hysterico-declamatory style; was ecstatic over Edmond About's writings in general, and *La Question Romaine* in particular; prided

herself on being personally acquainted with several revolutionary characters, and read the *Guardian* when she was in England. She had been taught many things, including a multiplicity of alleged facts, whose only title to the name was the fact of their being asserted ; but in education, properly so-called—the systematic training of soul, intellect, and heart—she was almost exceptionally deficient. Sometimes her better instincts rebelled faintly against playing second fiddle, but they were promptly put down and made to do as they were bid. So that she may be fairly described as a creature of second-hand impulse. Her features were well marked, rather than well formed; her countenance agitated, rather than expressive; her figure tall and large, but neither harmonious in form nor graceful in movement; her manner self-asserting, her general appearance pretentious. It was my lot to be seated between her, and—

Sixthly, Lady Alicia Grubhedge, wife of the most respectable Sir Thomas. She was the daughter of an Irish Earl, whose very proximate ancestor (for he had no remote ones) gained his peerage by favouring all measures calculated to render Ireland, as far as might be, uninhabitable for the Irish, and untenable for the English. Strictly speaking,

she had no opinions, but her mind was imbued with a few corollaries of one fundamental principle, viz.: the unalienable rights of the Protestant ascendancy. William the Third was her Rodolph of Hapsburg, and the history of England, prior to the battle of the Boyne, was to her a sealed book that she would not presume to understand.

There were four Anglican clergymen of four different schools, which may appropriately be described as the late High-and-dry, the Broad-decorative, the Institutional, and the Ritualistic; the first-named school being represented by Mr. Linus Jones before mentioned, the husband of Miss Hermione Crumps' sister. It differs from the Georgian High-and-dry school mainly in a certain grim attachment, under protest, to the first four centuries. The Broad-decorative churchman was Dr. Shale, brother of the young lady whose preference for the plunger used to wound my schoolboy susceptibilities. His strongest beliefs were 'views,' and he was a local authority on painted windows.

The Institutional school had a most respectable representative in Mr. Glenfillan Bruff, before mentioned. It is hardly a school, but rather an optimistic variety of several others, and it differs from the rest of the Establishment in this, that it accepts cheerfully the

consequences of being a State institution, instead of complaining, or pretending to be something else.

Ritualism was impersonated by a young man in an enormously long garment like a cassock, and a Roman collar, or something like one. He was mainly distinguishable by a restless sympathy with excommunicated Catholics and Greek schismatics, an habitual contempt for his own bishop, a fierce reverence for collective Episcopal authority in the abstract, and an interior assent to imaginary decrees of an impossible council.

Mrs. Linus Jones was a symmetrical woman on a large scale, with a mind balanced by false weights, that made her seem to herself and to many people, especially matter-of-fact ones, very sensible, practically judicious, highly principled, and amiable, insomuch that the general opinion of the neighbours epitomized her as a superior woman in general, and a right thinking one in particular. This effect was produced by doctoring the weights, not quite intentionally, yet not without a dim uncertain consciousness of causing people to assist facts. Her friends were wont to be ecstatic when observing how equal was the amount of pleasure she appeared to take in duties and in recreation, in attending to her

children, and in sympathizing very much with the world.

It never occurred to them that it costs little and pays well to put up for the reputation of a careful mother among people favourably pre-disposed, or incompetent to test the claim. It is one thing to be busy and another to work, one thing to make investments of time and another to practice self-denial. But it is often more profitable to a reputation, in social life, to seem laborious and self-denying than to be so, because people's attention is nudged and stirred up by the spasmodic action of dramatic domesticity, and because people are apt to be unconsciously pleased at hearing high praise given to something less than the utmost they could do themselves without an uncomfortable effort.

Therefore Mrs. Linus Jones was very comfortably popular. She excited no envy, for it made people feel comfortable to praise her. She had no occasion to strain her representative powers beyond what was natural, for a higher standard would have narrowed the sphere of her popularity, and made an open question of her right to the same. She was not called upon, either by herself or by other people, to be what she seemed, for the appearance was quite satisfactory to both. The

Anglican clergymen considered her to be a model wife ; their wives thought her a model mother ; the Archdeacon pronounced her an excellent clergyman's wife ; the master of the hounds asserted that she was " a devilish clever woman." Some called her a sweet woman, others an uncommonly fine woman, others a highly principled woman ; whilst others, again, were impressed with the largeness of her sympathies, and her tendency to quote from " Come into the garden, Maud." She accepted all this with a kind of deprecatory depreciativeness, very attractive to the unwary—a fact which, as she sat opposite to me, largely clothed and heavily chignoned, impressing her presence on the mind of a young man whose eyes wandered fugitively toward the younger of the two Miss Ardens, was sufficiently apparent.

Mrs. Shale was a little suppressed looking woman, with unnoticing eyes, and a washed-out complexion. She retailed her husband's opinions apologetically, and collected butterflies.

Miss Gertrude Arden, a niece of Sir Roger's, who was seated next but one to Hermione Crumps, was really a remarkable specimen of what can be done with a nature good as far as it goes, but small. Protestant friends felt sure

that a convent education had "impeded her development," whatever that might mean, and occasionally some very unintellectual Catholics thought that her intellect might have been more cultivated: but the truth was wide of their wisdom. The fact was, that her instructors had so thoroughly made the most of her in every way, that she might well be credited with a margin which had no real existence. The distinctive characteristics of a well-trained Catholic maiden—the special purity, the expression of baptismal innocence, the absence of self-consciousness, the illuminative presence of Divine faith, the practical wisdom of Catholic instincts—made one recognize in her an indescribable superiority over girls far above her in natural gifts of every kind. Her features were of a type originally good, but weakened, and, so to speak, worn down unevenly: therefore she was neither handsome nor pretty, in the strict sense of those words. Her manner was considered by certain superficial observers to be unformed, her talk trifling, her tastes apparently frivolous. But the expression of baptismal innocence softened the outline of features that in any one of the guests at that table would have been little short of plain; her manner seemed to be unformed only because she was brought into

comparison with people whose constant self-consciousness brought theirs changefully into evidence ; her talk appeared trifling because it was not rash, depreciative, or presumptuous ; her tastes were apparently frivolous because they were innocent. Had she been a saint and a genius, no doubt her somewhat passive goodness would have risen to the heroic, and her innocent faith to something more instructive ; but the social machinery has to be worked by more every-day means, and if the smaller wires were pulled by no worse hands we should have fewer breakages perhaps.

Miss Winifred Arden, Sir Roger's second daughter, was of a stronger type in everything : in features unmistakably, and little less than unmistakably in that collective expression from them, which, for want of a better term, goes by the name of countenance. And not only was hers a stronger type, but in a certain sense a higher one—actually, though perhaps not originally, higher. The original pattern was the same as her father's—and a fine old pattern it was, pure and vigorous as a church window of the thirteenth century. For her the proportions and strength of the prototype had been transmitted entire : to her cousin, altered and weakened, like the same window perpendicularized. Thus it was

that she was beautiful, in spite of a distant family likeness to a cousin who was almost the reverse. This fact I noted while Miss Hermione Crumps was struggling with the bones of a red mullet.

I now began to speculate as to who the young man might be who was listening with joyless civility to an exposition of principles from Mrs. Linus Jones.

He seemed about five and twenty, rather more than less. His appearance and manner were prepossessing—I apologise for that threadbare term, but they were so. His features were of a noble cast, and his countenance indicated, in the true sense of the words, a noble nature. There was no appearance of more than average brain-power, but what he had was evidently in sound working order. Whether he was that generic being known in England as a foreigner, or merely an absentee Englishman, I could not make out; but it was somehow clear that he had lived much abroad, and equally so that he was not at home with Mrs. Linus Jones. Miss Arden, Sir Roger's eldest daughter, a lady and gentleman whose names I failed to catch, and two young men, with faces quite undistinguishable from numberless others, made up the party.

“Non ragioniam di lor, ma guarda e passa.”

The conversation flowed on like a mill-stream, rapidly and by external forces; the motive power being, in some to give pleasure, in others to gain approbation, in others to enforce applause, in others to make themselves quietly conspicuous by cutting away the social dignity of successful repartee from some one else. There was a certain physical vigour in it, not entirely separable from the influence of an exceptionally good dinner; and there was also a kind of competitive intenseness, amiable, friendly, self-seeking, spiteful, or merely apparent and conventional, as the case might be.

The Ardens talked to give pleasure, even the empty-headed second son did so in a degree; Mrs. Linus Jones to gain approbation; her sister and Mr. Crayston to enforce applause; Sherborne to make himself quietly conspicuous by putting down Crayston. Don Pascolini would, no doubt, have tried to give pleasure if he had happened to have a chance of so doing; but, as he was placed between Lady Alicia Grubhedge, whose small understanding was only accessible in English, and Mr. Glenfillan Bruff, whose sprightly self-satisfaction was simply impenetrable, his opportunities were limited. As to the young man who was being talked to by Mrs. Linus

Jones, he appeared to be out of the mill-stream altogether. He listened with his ears but not with his mind; and he made no attempt whatever to let any one know that he also had a personality of his own.

It is said that dreams, however long their fulness of detail may cause them to seem, are really instantaneous; but it is certain that almost in the twinkling of an eye one can take observations which, when subjected to the cumbrous contrivances of language, drag themselves out to a portentous length—and the reader will perhaps have found this to his cost; for be it known that the observations I took on the worthy people who sat round that dinner-table, lengthy as they may seem in description, occupied no more time than was barely sufficient for Miss Hermione Crumps to eat her fish fast and fiercely. In fact, I had taken down my notes in mental shorthand, and was just about to make some mild remark on some indefinite subject, when she looked up suddenly—

“La bocca sollevò dal fiero pasto,”

and in reference to the said mild remark, which happened to be on what I must call, for want of a better term, comparative climatology, answered me as follows :—

“ Oh, yes, isn’t it horrid, after the glorious Italian sun, so strong and so intense? Even the hottest summer’s day here is chilly by comparison; at least, it seems so in a way that I can feel but can’t explain. Don’t *you*, now? I am sure you do, because you have been so much abroad, and the Italians are as intense as their own sun—— ”

“ Or their own tramontana wind,” quoth I—I really couldn’t help it.

A backward jerk of her chignon, and a partial eclipse of the unsteady light that was wont to shoot forth from her eyes when she was talking, caused me to understand that the antithesis had not pleased her; so, to modify it, I went on to say that the tramontana, though sharp, was short and freshening. Here I stopped abruptly, afraid of being driven into a worse than unprofitable discussion on the sickening subject of Italian politics; but the topic was evidently her *cheval-de-bataille* for conversation: she had got it up carefully, and enriched it with many indefinite words of indefinite import. Nevertheless, thought I, it shall be shoved on one side, if I have to upset the epergne to do it.

My resolution was quickly put to the proof. She arranged the skirt of her dress, gave a downward glance at the same, and then, raising her eyes, not to, but at me, said—

"I don't know whether I am speaking to a friend of Italy or not."

"Talking of friends of Italy," said I, "did you ever come across that book (I forget the author's name) that makes out Italian to be an older language than Latin?"

The interruption was a signal failure. She made a half-turn in her chair, and said—

"Do you know, I have not read it yet: it must be intensely interesting. I can well believe that Italian *was* the original language. And how delightful it is to see Italy now—isn't it?"

"There are friends, and friends of Italy," said I.

This trite remark appeared to be unintelligible to her, so I added—

"There are true friends, and false friends, and mistaken friends. A true friend will not countenance his friend in bad actions; a false friend will encourage him to do them; a mistaken friend will consent to them through misapprehension or weakness. But I am becoming prosy."

"Not in the least. I delight in being talked to by a man who will express his real sentiments, whatever they may be," quoth Hermione with energy. "I hate to be treated like a child, and given only sugar plums. But you were going on to say——"

Into the trap I straightway fell. For the life of me I could not find any conversational by-path to get me into any other subject.

"You said that it is delightful to look at Italy as she is now," I replied: "for my own part I can only think of the fisherman in the 'Arabian Nights,' who inadvertently let a genius out of the leaden vessel in which he had been shut up by King Solomon. The lid of that vessel (if I remember rightly) had the name of God engraven on it, and therefore the genius could not get out till it was removed; then out he came, drew himself up in the form of thick black smoke, and finally took the shape of a horrible monster. But the astute oriental, having enticed him back by pretending to disbelieve that he would fit into so small a space, quickly shut down the lid, and was again master of the situation. Analogously, the monster of Revolution was kept in from 1815 until he was let out at Castelfidardo, because governments had not yet ceased to be Christian. But then they let him out; and he gradually reared his head, until at last, out of a shapeless mass of wickedness, he confronted renegade Cæsarism with the full programme of the International. The Catholic sovereigns of Europe threw off the fear of God, and let the monster escape

them. They will not find him so easy to deal with as the compressible genius ; but if they *do* succeed in gaining the upper hand, in consequence of his showing too rashly what he can do, he will soon get the better of them again, unless they entitle themselves to God's protection. And, if they don't mind, he won't give them the chance of shutting down the lid ; he will treat them as the genius would have treated the fisherman, if the fisherman had not been too sharp for him. The genius had sworn, during the first hundred years of his imprisonment, that, if any one should let him out, he would make him the richest man in the world ; afterwards he swore that he would make his liberator a potent monarch ; finally, he was 'that aggravated' that he swore he would kill him, only allowing the unlucky wight to choose the manner of his death. Similarly caged, Revolution held out to Society, at first luxury, then licence, and finally, destruction either by violence or vice. This is the present position of society, and nowhere more so than in Italy. The monster will certainly put his threat into execution, if they give him the opportunity much longer."

Why I thought of all this, and, still more, why I gave utterance to it, as I did, and to

such a listener as Miss Hermione Crumps too, I cannot tell. But it had this advantage, that she hazarded no further remarks to me on the subject of Italy either during that dinner party or afterwards. The discussion of an *entrée* relieved her at that moment from the necessity of an immediate reply, and, when I renewed my conversation with her, I took care to make remarks more suitable to the occasion. I asked all sorts of local questions; and the more I found that she was a comparative stranger to the county, the more I asked them—not as if addressed to her, but as if I was airing my recollections. Thence I passed on to different kinds of small talk, touching on most small subjects, from pigeon-shooting and bridesmaids' dresses to the current price of pug dogs. At length we came to a short pause; and, whilst I was thinking to myself, "What shall I say next that will be farthest from Italian politics?" the Ritualist, who sat on the other side of her, began to quote from Mr. Ffoulkes *et hoc genus omne*. I turned to my next neighbour, and found myself talking to Lady Alicia Grubhedge.

The dialogue was of an extremely simple character. On my part it was made up entirely of negative propositions, mild and

colourless: on hers, it consisted of social theories founded on principles that had no basis, like a wall built on a morass. It was pitiable to hear her monotonous lamentations, but still more so to think how many people in England, well intentioned and honest like her, are, like her, reduced to mumble and whine at the evils of the day, unconsciously contributing to their growth by sullen hostility to the one and only power on earth capable of resisting them.

An abridgment of her table-talk would run thus: "Nothing can go on as it used to do. It's quite enough that a thing was, for it to be changed and pulled down. It's nothing but destruction. And what they have got by their education and their revolutionary measures, and by letting Jews and Roman Catholics into Parliament, and all that! I always hated the sight of that Cardinal Wiseman driving about, and I happen to know he made the Fenians; and Dr. Manning will be the ruin of this country some day, only I ought not to say it in this house, and perhaps you're a Roman Catholic. I hope not; I mean, I wouldn't say so if you were. And there's that Bradlaugh and the rest: I always knew what the Papal aggression would do for us."

Now, what could one say in answer to this poor, moving nonsense? Under correction, nothing at all. She was simply one of the numerous victims to that organized system of enormous lying which created the great popery tradition in England. She virtually believed in the infallibility of her old governess, who had taught her in accordance with that tradition; and the utterances of *The Rock* were to her as articles of faith.

It is said that when King Victor Emmanuel, of Sardinia and elsewhere, made some personal remarks about the Emperor Napoleon the Third to the French Ambassador, the latter replied, "Your majesty will permit me not to have heard a word of what you have just spoken." Well, I did not exactly address Lady Alicia in those terms, but I took French leave to answer at cross purposes, as if I had unconsciously misapprehended her words; for she meant to be kind, and was quite honest in herself. In fact, I answered her intentions, not her words.

But Miss Hermione Crumps grew weary of the Ritualist before their conversation had lasted many minutes; for the truth was she had never heard of Mr. Ffoulkes, and knew the ex-Père Hyacinthe only by his photograph, thought that the A.P.U.C. was a

cricket club, and preferred General Prim to Dr. Döllinger; so that she gave him up as hopelessly incomprehensible, and tried me again.

Having by tacit consent banished regenerated Italy from the list of subjects, we got on very fairly for a time; but before the end of dinner the intervals of silence became more frequent and more prolonged. We began to search, and speculate, and dwell wearily on the fag ends of stories that had no particular cause of introduction. At last she bethought herself of something which never fails to light up the embers of conversation—a ghost story.

“Are you fond of ghost stories?” she asked rather suddenly, after we had been talking about the neighbourhood for a few minutes.

“I shall be delighted to hear you tell one,” I replied.

“Well, you know Hazeley?”

“I knew it well, but I have not been in this country for some years.”

“Did you ever hear of a ghost there?”

“Never.”

“Of course I don’t believe in them, you know; but should you like to hear it?”

“I shall be delighted to hear any story you may tell.”

"Yes, yes ; but do you care about ghost stories ? "

"Not particularly."

"Oh, you are not worthy of it then, and I won't tell it. It's very curious and remarkable—very—and romantic and mysterious, and all that. Not that I believe in those things: everybody knows they can be accounted for scientifically."

She ceased speaking, and lowered her eyes in the direction of the bouquet in front of her dress. I interpreted the movement to signify that she wished to seem indifferent about ghost stories in general, and the telling of that one in particular, but was not so really. It was little less than evident that, but for the honour of the thing, she might as well have had no religion at all, so well had the honeyed blasphemies of sycophantic *emigrati*, and the hard religionism of her brother-in-law, succeeded in frostbiting those germs of indefinite faith which often grow up spontaneously in Protestantized England, as it were, under the shade of the old parish churches. But that was no hindrance to a belief in ghosts ; rather the reverse. When the space is empty where faith ought to be, something must fill the vacuum. Hero-worship not unfrequently does that office ; but

the space is large, and the substitutes are apt to shrink up after a time. What next? Perhaps table-rapping, for those who are spiritually *blasé*, and ghost stories for those who have any freshness of soul left.

Miss Hermione was not insensible to the dreamy delights of that subjective spiritualism, elastic and unexact; but she was ashamed to own it, lest any one should mistake what was superstitious, and she thought was not so, for what was not, and she thought was. Hence all this beating about the bush before the inevitable ghost story was told—for told at last it was of course.

"I don't think I shall tell it you, for you will only call me superstitious; and I am not so, I assure you," said she, as the ice was being handed round.

"No, I never use words in general society that have no definite meaning there," said I.

"Ah, but you would say something else with the same meaning."

"What meaning?"

"Now don't. I know you are dying to hear the story, and I have a great mind not to tell it you; but I won't be so hard, though you deserve that I should. Well, the story is this:—

"You see, it's a strange old house, full of

gables and galleries and odd corners. They say there's a tiny room, no more than a closet, under the floor of a dark attic, in the oldest part of the house, and very puzzling to find, where the priests used to hide : but that was a long time ago."

"Yes, not later than our reverses in the American War," said I parenthetically.

"Well, I don't know about that," said she quickly.

"Do you wish to know?" said I.

"I meant that I was trying to get on with the story," said she, fixing her eyes with a studied expression of carelessness on the *ménu*, which happened to lie before her.

One should never volunteer information to any one who evidently takes pride in not having it; for, if the person to whom you offer it be a man, he will keep you at bay with sonorous sophistries *till you are interrupted*; and if you have to deal with a woman, she will contrive somehow to put you in a false position. Miss Hermione's answer—"I don't know about that," was made to drop its proper meaning, and to signify—"I more than question your alleged fact—indeed, I know better;" whilst, owing to her peculiarly feminine gesture of aggressive resignation at being apparently delayed in continuing

her story, I had no time to retrieve the false step.

"But the ghost story?" I said, feeling that the least said was soonest mended.

"Didn't you want to tell me something about the American war first?" said she; "or," she added in a languid tone, as if carelessly correcting herself, "something about religion."

This was just a little too much, especially as she said the last few words loud enough for the Ritualist on her right to hear, and did so evidently on purpose. So I said in an equally audible voice, "I answered you about an historical fact on which you were either indistinctly informed, or distinctly misinformed—I don't quite know which, and you wish to turn my remark about the date of the latest priest-hunting into an attempt at edging in doctrinal argument, and you have shown much aptitude for the task. But you want a little more experience in the art of word-conjuring. You were quite right, according to your own principles, when you made my words appear tiresome before you proceeded to give them a meaning not their own—one must smear out a picture before one can paint over the canvas; but you want a little more practice."

She looked at me for a moment or two,

much puzzled, not so much in her mind as in her—I had better say, feelings, to avoid a less euphemistic word; then she coloured, but under protest, as appeared from various self-asserting gestures of a mild sort, such as a sudden stiffening up of the body, and an unnecessary resettlement of the flower in the back of her hair. At length she laughed gruffly, and said—

“That wasn’t it at all, not the least. But I see you want the ghost story, and so here it is. Well, you know the house better than I do, I believe. I never saw it but once. You know what long passages there are in it, and ghostly corners—are there not?”

I was on the point of disclaiming any knowledge of what a ghostly corner might mean; but, deeming it inexpedient to say so, I met her half-way, by saying that I remembered the dark corners; and she went on as follows, almost without taking breath—

“They say that Mr. Sherborne’s great-grandmother, or something, was a very queer old woman, and came wrongly by the place. I don’t exactly remember what I heard about it, but they say there is some bad story about it, and that there is an old woman about the place who knows a lot about it; but I dare say it’s only gossip. However, the people say

that the old great-grandmother's ghost haunts part of the house, and that she has spoken to people, or to some person at any rate—I believe it was this old woman who knows all about it. She was a servant there, I think, or a governess, or a companion, or something; and I am told that none of the maid-servants will remain, except, of course, the old house-keeper, who has been there for ages, and one old housemaid. A girl that went to be kitchenmaid from my brother-in-law's parish, left only last week, declaring she couldn't stop there any longer, for as she was in bed one night (you must know she slept in the attic next to the one where there is the trap-door going down into the priest's hiding-hole) she heard a sound of footsteps, and thought it proceeded from the next room, which was used to keep boxes in, and, getting up, she opened the door to see who it could be. The moon was quite bright, shining through the window, and she distinctly saw, so she said, a very old lady lift the trap door, which was at the farther end, and go down into the hiding hole. The girl was so frightened that she called one of the other servants. They lighted a candle and peered down into the hole. I think it was very courageous, but no one was to be seen, and there is no exit from it. So

they gave warning the next day. And other people too declare that they have seen the old lady, and a mysterious light in an upper room, and her shadow passing across it. Now, of course, I don't believe all this ; but it sounds very odd, doesn't it? Did you ever hear of all this?"

"I can't say that I *never* heard anything about it," said I; "for now that you recall it to my recollection, I *do* remember to have heard, when a child, that old Mrs. Sherborne's husband haunted the house, or a part of the house; but I never heard more than that."

"What do you think about it?"

"I suppose some one saw a light in a window late at night, and some one else saw a curtain shake in the wind by moonlight, and thought it looked like old Mrs. Sherborne's portrait."


At this moment the ladies began to file off from the dining-room, which event probably saved me from being examined in Mrs. Crowe's "Night-side of Nature."

CHAPTER VII.

THE QUEER INHABITANT OF THE HOUSE AT THE
FOUR WAYS.

“Non ingenerantur hominibus mores tam a stirpe generis ac seminis, quam ex iis rebus quæ ab ipsâ naturâ loci, et a vitæ consuetudine suppeditantur, quibus alimur et vivimus.”—CICERO.

WHEN Julius Cæsar asked the Belgic Britons, near the banks of the Thames, who the ancestors of their Celtic neighbours were, he was told that they were the spontaneous production of the soil; and no doubt they were so, though not in the sense intended by the worthy ethnologists who undertook to describe them for his information. No doubt they were what is called redolent of the soil, or in other words, had received from the locality they lived in a certain character perceptible and distinct. If not, they must have been individually more original, or collectively less so, than the later inhabitants; for at least among English country gentlemen, there was, and is



still, though in a diminishing, perhaps a rapidly diminishing degree, a certain habit of mind on certain subjects, a certain practical instinct, self-conscious, but not communicative, in short, a certain corporate idiosyncrasy apart from that of the individual, and depending on locality or manner of life, rather than on family and parentage. I am not alluding to the influence of geographical features and particular provincial customs on the different classes in a rural population, for such an inquiry might be long enough for an essay, and would at any rate be quite out of place here, but to the general result of certain conditions, physical and mental, under which English country gentlemen live and flourish.

Within the meaning of the term "country gentlemen," I include, conveniently for the present purpose : firstly, resident landed proprietors, great and small, with their sons of course ; secondly, hirers of country places, who enter into country life by taking interest in local self-government, agriculture, etc. ; thirdly, Anglican clergymen, who have comfortable benefices, and a "proud submission" to the theology of the Privy Council ; fourthly, curates who aspire to such benefices, and do not offend the once-a-week theory which is an integral part of religion in the mind of the

Protestant bucolic. All these men have corporate, apart from individual characteristics; the former being, perhaps, more openly shown, but less clear—more openly shown because people do not care to conceal what is sanctioned by the authority of extensive companionship, less clear because it is difficult to separate them from those of the individuals who compose the body.

I propounded this theory to Don Pascolini next day. I had just returned from shooting, and found him taking a stroll down the avenue. We began to talk about English country houses, because they were a new experience to him.

“How are you impressed, if at all, by English country life, so far as you have seen?” I asked.

“Favourably as to the kind of life, and as to the nature of the people who follow it—unfavourably as to the conditions by which both are modified,” said he.

We walked on in silence a little way, and after a while I proposed my theory of corporate characteristics. He appeared to reflect for a few moments, and then asked the very pertinent question—

“What are they?”

Now, in truth I had not arrived so far as

that: I could see where, but not what, or if I could, it was through a mist; and I owned the fact, not without a sense of shame. He came to my assistance unexpectedly—very unexpectedly, for he waited I should think two or three minutes before he spoke, and then he said—

“I am not qualified to give an opinion about it worth anything, but it seems to me that perhaps one of the characteristics which you say belong to country gentlemen collectively, may be defined as the habit of representing the external action of their finer qualities.

“Yes,” said I. “But one observes the same in others as well: it seems to be characteristic of Englishmen in general.”

“As Englishmen simply, or as Englishmen and something besides?”

“As Englishmen and something besides, as Englishmen spiritually disinherited, as men whose minds are shackled by a tradition that flatters self-esteem, and fixes prejudice, but fails to satisfy heart, soul, or intellect—a tradition which can seem respectable only by disclaiming its origin, and ancient only by disclaiming its respectability.”

“You think it then a characteristic not original in the race, but an after-growth produced by the action of something foreign to

the true nature of the people and injurious to their true interests."

"Yes; and by that something I mean the Reformation."

"You think that the habit of negatively affecting a lower tone of mind than their own is an excrescence from a kind of shame-faced humility?"

"Yes; a kind of schoolboy shame at the idea of looking like a sneak, by making themselves out better than somebody else."

"And you think that this feeling has, to a certain extent, changed its nature?"

"I do. I think that the bluff humility is, to a great extent, adulterated with an admixture of human respect, instinctive but often unconscious. Fear of being sneered at—which fear is much increased by the moral taciturnity of their friends, and the consequent difficulty of knowing how high a moral standard they will bear, has a great deal to do with it."

"But who is that old woman under the clump of trees yonder? She has been watching us, and following at a little distance, and apparently listening."

We had strayed out of the avenue and were following the line of a foot-path, watching the effect of the light and shade on the scene

before us. The effect was singularly picturesque and wild. The sun had just set beneath a dark, almost black horizon, leaving a blood-red line of light enclosed in masses of storm-cloud that gradually rolled in, to quench it before its time : and when the last gleams of this fiery twilight fell on the cloaked figure of the old woman, as she advanced and crouched and listened among the trees, while the antlers of the deer peeped up from a foreground of high fern, and a solitary crow flew heavily by through the gathering darkness, one felt that if there was no mystery in the sudden appearance of the old woman at that moment, there ought to be.

We were not kept long in suspense as to her present intention. She drew herself up, and came towards us with an air of tremulous determination that brought us at once to a halt. Who she could be, and what she wanted with us, was a puzzle beyond the range of guess-work ; but that she did want to speak with one or both of us, and meant to attain her object, was unmistakable. So we stood still, and awaited the result.

When she had approached within two or three hundred yards, it struck me that I had seen her before, but I was then unable to remember where, when, or under what circum-

stances. An indistinct recollection arose in my mind of wondrous conjectural tales, half-heard on winter evenings, and invested with an unfathomable mystery in my infant mind, by the flickering candle, the broken whispers, the hollow roar of the wind in the chimney, and the baying of the watch-dog in the stable-yard.

Whoever she might be, she evidently wanted to address one of us, and that one was not myself; for she turned aside as soon as she had taken a keen survey of our two faces, and then, bearing down upon Don Pascolini, stood still just in front of him. They stood looking at each other for a few seconds, he in quiet astonishment, she collecting her unquietness into a steady focus. At length she addressed him decisively, thus :—

“ You’re a Catholic priest, and a foreigner ? ”

“ I am,” he replied ; adding rather quickly, for fear of mistakes, “ I understand English very little.”

“ That is unfortunate,” said she, “ for I am quite out of the habit of speaking French ; and Italian I never could speak, though I read it a good deal, many many years ago. You are an Italian—are you not ? ”

He bowed assent to the last words ; and then she went on to say, in very fair French for one who was unaccustomed to the language :—

"I will try to explain myself in French ; but it will be difficult for me, and I must ask your indulgence. But you must—yes, you really must be patient, and listen to what I am going to say."

"Who on earth," said I to myself, "can this old woman be whose words cause one to scrutinize her dress?" Then I remembered a certain Mrs. Smith, who used to live mysteriously in a lonely house at the corner of four lonely lanes, and was considered by the neighbours to be either a free-thinker, a Jesuit, or a wandering Jew who had taken to sedentary habits.

"Who is that?" she asked, after she had given a rapid and piercing glance at me.

Don Pascolini was unable to give her the desired information, for he had either forgotten my name or never heard it.

I prompted him, and he repeated my patronymic after me. She looked again at my face, and then, turning again to him, said—

"Very well ; but I must speak to you alone—I must, indeed."

"Are you a Catholic?" asked Don Pascolini, after a pause, during which, as it seemed to me, he was wishing heartily that he had walked in another direction.

"No," she replied : "In some respects I wish

I were No! it cannot be. I am not—not at all. But I have something very important to say; and I know that Catholic priests are trained to advise well, and to help people in trouble.”

“But there is the priest of the mission,” said Don Pascolini. “Surely you had better go to see him.”

“No,” said she, very emphatically; “he is a very good man, I believe: but there is a reason why I must speak to you and not to him.”

“I am a foreigner,” said he; “a total stranger to this country, and I cannot speak a dozen words of English consecutively.”

“If you will listen to me,” she answered, in a tone of suppressed irritability, “I will convince you that he would not do as well as you. I have come to you just because you *are* a foreigner.”

“But foreigners are from various countries,” he urged; “perhaps you are looking for a Frenchman, and I am from the north of Italy.”

“Yes, I know you are an Italian,” she said; “but I can’t help that. Perhaps it will do as well so. In short, I must and will speak to you privately.”

“Suppose I were to decline being the con-

fidant of your secret," said he, "is it probable that any one would be injured in consequence of my refusal?"

"If you do so," she replied solemnly, "you will find it difficult to settle the account with your own conscience."

"Very well, then," said he. "But I am afraid I shall need an interpreter in order to understand clearly."

She reflected for a moment or two, and acknowledged the difficulty. The fact was that her French, which was pretty good at first starting, had proved unequal to further demands on its resources, just as muscles, long unused, acquit themselves for a short effort, but break down in attempting to sustain it.

She fixed her eyes on me, and said—

"I think I can trust you. I believe your father was an honest man. Now will you pledge me your word that you will not mention to any one what I am going to say before you, until the time shall have come when it is right it should be known?"

Like Don Pascolini, I felt that I was fairly in for it. I gave her the required promise, and opened my ears. And so did she, as it appeared, for she detected more quickly than I did the sound of some footsteps on the grass,

and she turned quickly in the direction whence it proceeded.

"We are seen," she said.

"Never mind," said I—for I wanted to get it over at once. "We are not conspirators."

"If I had meant the whole parish to listen I should not have waited here half the day for this interview," she replied, with a quick movement of impatience and a short laugh.

I acknowledged myself shut up, and passively submitted to her dictation. So did Don Pascolini. We both felt that we had to go through the strange business which had been thrust upon us, not only against our will, but even in spite of our endeavours to avoid it. The old woman was mistress of the situation.

"You are not going to leave Bramscote yet?" she asked.

"I am going to stay some days," said I. "I am not sure about Don Pascolini."

"My stay at Bramscote is uncertain," said the latter.

"Then you will come to my house to-morrow morning at eleven o'clock—will you not?" said she earnestly.

Don Pascolini and I promised that we would do so; and she added in a low voice, addressing myself—

"At eleven o'clock, then. You must re-

member where I live—at the corner of the four lanes by the fir wood.”

“Yes,” said I, as she moved away in the opposite direction to that in which the sounds of the footsteps had proceeded.

And there we stood, Don Pascolini and I, looking at each other as if waiting for some explanatory information which neither of us was able to give.

“Well,” said I, “I wonder what the plot of this drama is.”

“I wish we had walked in some other direction,” said Don Pascolini. “I have no desire to be set down in the play as ‘The Intriguing Priest,’ or ‘The Jesuit in Disguise.’”

“After all,” said I, “it seems to be only advice that she wants.”

He simply repeated after me, but with an emphasis that suggested much, the words, “Only advice !”

“True,” said I, in answer to the intonation. “But then you will have a witness ?”

“Well,” said he, “I could not in conscience refuse such a request so solemnly made ; and after all, I have often been placed in very much worse positions, not merely disagreeable ones, but dangerous and compromising.”

“Through pretended penitents in the interest of the Revolution ?” I added.

He made a slight gesture of assent and walked on, till, in the dark, we almost ran against some one coming along the path. It was the same person who had caused the old woman to disappear by the sound of his footsteps, and he turned out to be Father Ranford, the priest of the mission. I remembered having seen and spoken to him after dinner on the previous day, and if I forgot (as I think I did) to include him in the list of the people I met at that dinner-table, it was very odd, and indeed unaccountable, unless on the principle that the mind, like the body, may be stunned by being struck too hard ; for certainly my attention was forcibly drawn to what Mr. Glenfillan Bruff, Mr. Linus Jones, and Dr. Shale said and looked in respect of him. Agreeing in nothing else, they had displayed an edifying unity in the half-veiled aversion that they put forth, like a domesticated Cerberus, between him and them. Of course they were not rude, but they were implicitly offensive by means of carefully unpointed omissions that showed where the points had been padded.

It so chanced that, as he was walking with us part of the way home, I said this, or words to the same effect. He smiled and replied—

“You are hard upon them. Remember that no-popery traditions and the accomplished fact of possessing all the old Catholic endowments, are the title-deeds of the Establishment.”

CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH, PARENTHETICALLY, SHERBORNE MAKES HIS COMMENTS ON A SMALL BUT PROLIFIC SCANDAL, TAKEN NOT UNWILLINGLY BY MANY, AND GIVEN, OUT OF THE DEPTHS OF THEIR DEFICIENCIES, BY A FEW.

“ . . . He must beware, if happily he have occasion of necessary business, at his departure from home, not to have his hawke tyed on a pearche of any greate length from the grounde, for feare of bating and hanging by the heeles, for then either will she caste hir gorge, or otherwise spoyle hyrselſe.”—*The Booke of Falconrie*.

I suppose that most of us are socially tied on a perch—in other words, compelled by artificial necessities to let ourselves appear before the world more or less above the level of our actual selves, yet far below what we might be if we were not so tied; and I suppose that this social perch is so far useful, that if it hinders us from soaring, it also checks inadvortence. Yet it may be too high, so that in endeavouring to reach higher still, we only

spoil ourselves, like the aforesaid hawk; and the instances of such misplaced self-confidence are not very unfrequent. But surely the most pitiable exhibition in that line is the tragicomic spectacle of a worldly English Catholic,

“Most ignorant of what he’s most assured,
His glassy essence,”

in which the bad fit of the self-assertion he has clothed himself with is seen as distinctly as a stereoscopic portrait. The world will not take him at his own valuation; for the world, with the unerring instinct which it ever displays in distinguishing between its fellow-craftsmen and its honorary members, can perceive that there is a reservation in his interior assent to its principles and practice. The world will make use of him, patronize him, flatter him to a certain extent and in a certain way, when and how it suits its purpose to do so; but it despises him both from its own standpoint and from his. It despises him from its own standpoint as a bungling pretender in a craft he does not understand; it despises him from his for his human respect, which no true Englishman really tolerates in a Catholic, whatever may be said, done or inferred to the contrary notwithstanding.

And if that were the only effect produced

by the efforts of these amateur worldlings, the mischief would be limited; but unhappily it has consequences growing out of it, consequences that were visible to the naked eye before, at, and after dinner, on that second day of my visit.

For then and afterwards, till about the end of my stay at Bramscote, there were two guests who did their amateur worldliness in an offensive manner, and gave false models for popular representations of practical catholicity. One was a man whose personal appearance I forget, insomuch that I should probably not recognize his photograph, if I were to see it. All I remember about him is that his mouth had got itself into angles by dint of expressing his conviction of his own importance; his eyes had a rude twinkle of semi-polished self-assertion.

The other was a lady whose appearance and manner combined to show that she ought to have been well-bred, and was not; in other words, that she had bartered her birthright of good breeding for a very uncertain tenure of a doubtful ascendancy among Protestant pleasure hunters and over-dressed girls of the period. She had, as it were, abdicated the honourable and dignified position of an hereditary Catholic, in the land of More, Fisher,

and the missionary Priests, to grasp and clutch at a stray trinket in the tinsel crown of deteriorated fashion, and establish an unhonoured notoriety on the sufferance of a generation that will tolerate any one who will entertain lavishly, and stun people by sheer weight of purse.

Like the jackdaw in peacock's feathers, she dressed herself up in the exclusiveness of the fine ladies that once were; but having neither their cleverness, their tact, their graceful manners, nor their knowledge of the world, she looked vulgar therein. Yet the jackdaw in his natural state finds his home in more honourable places than the peacock can attain to.

Sherborne happened to sit next me after the ladies had left the dining-room, and he began talking on this subject in the uncertain tone which had so often unsettled my reading of his character, yet might have helped me to understand it, and did so afterwards. He was near the end of the table farthest from Sir Roger. There was no one beyond him on the same side, no one just opposite, and my next neighbour was a chair's width off, talking sonorously to some one opposite on some local topics. Sherborne, who had been silent and moody all dinner-time, pushed the claret

as far as possible across the table, lowered his head in apparent contemplation of the filberts on his plate, and spoke without turning towards me.

"I like one thing or the other," said he. "Don't you?"

"Certainly," I replied; "and especially the other."

He smiled a grim smile, and said—

"Yes; but what do you think of pious worldliness in Catholics, who are supposed to have some self-knowledge, and to call a spade a spade in their own consciences?"

"I should question their piety or their brains," I replied.

"All right; but let us drop the wise saws, and take up the modern instances. There is one famous specimen in the house."

"There are two ways of looking at that question—admitting the fact," said I; "and the one goes far towards balancing the other. The comparative amenities of the Protestant world in England to Catholics are of so recent a date, that it is hardly to be wondered at, if we find silly women and lightly ballasted men kicking up their heels like ponies got suddenly into condition; but the airs they give themselves are childish rather than malicious. Don't forget their great comparative sim-

plicity, or you will form an unfair judgment of them."

"But their moral standard is higher, or at least more defined: and they go to confession, which, though I am not saying that I approve of it, certainly ought to give them a deeper insight into the quality of their own actions, and a clearer self-knowledge than you have a right to expect from others who have not their advant— who are differently circumstanced."

I took no notice of the significant elision, but considered within myself for a few seconds as to what might be the least alterable reply. For I knew that answers to such questions, after they have got into the questioner's mind, are apt to change their nature by a process of mental assimilation, especially when the non-Catholic questioner is, unknown to himself, forging sophisms out of his unsettled intellect wherewith to fetter the instinct of his struggling faith.

"Well, what have you to say about it?" he said, trying to look impenetrable, and partially succeeding in the attempt.

"I have to say," said I, "first, that your comparison is unfair; and secondly, that the follies you mention, taken at their worst, are immeasurably less bad than the sins that in the non-Catholic world pass unnoticed."

“How is the comparison unfair?” he asked, after he had skinned a walnut with much deliberation.

“Because,” I replied, “you are comparing a definite few specially circumstanced with an indefinite many who are not so. Catholics (I mean, of course, those among them who attend to their religious duties) are positively warned off from many an easy path of pleasant sin over which Protestants are allowed to stray under certain restrictions, like Eton boys out of bounds ; and the only two points in which such Catholics can show any gratitude to the world for the trouble it takes to corrupt their principles, is to go in for over-dress and social impertinence. If you examine these two follies, or whatever their proper epithet may be, you will find that they are aberrations from something lawful, and that the point of departure is difficult to put one’s finger on. Over-dressing is the excess of dressing according to one’s position : social impertinence I suppose to be an exaggerated, capricious, and self-sufficient setting forth of that position. But where is the exact frontier-line ? Now, when people don’t see a point of departure, they are slow to discover that they are off the road at all, especially if there are no particular landmarks to fix their attention ; and, there-

fore, it is unjust to infer that the consciences of these people are dishonest because they don't pull them up for strutting about like turkey-cocks, and loading themselves with expensive clothes.

"I thought that pride was a mortal sin," said he, still peeling his walnut.

"Of course it is," said I; "but making an ass of one's self is not, unless one does so under the influence of something that is mortal sin; and I don't for a moment believe that such is the case in the instance you refer to. Self-deception, owing to defective head-ballast, makes these good people fail to see where dignity ends and bumptiousness begins, or to moderate the superfluous clothes whose price might save the souls of children threatened with board schools."

"When I was a boy, and after," said he, "Catholics were distinguishable for their good breeding, unassuming dignity, and just instincts of position. The supercilious assumption, the capricious exclusiveness, and the self-satisfied devotion to marketable successes in society, which I see in some of them now, are a fungus growth of late years."

"I know that," I replied, "and I was just going to account for the difference. The forefathers of these people suffered persecution,

long, terrible, and wearying, for the faith ; and if you trace the history of that persecution, you will find that it worked on a sliding scale singularly well suited to disarrange mental ballast in the course of time—so much so, that, but for the supernatural force of Catholicity, the result would have been immeasurably and irretrievably worse. Look at the apostates of the last century, who fell away like rotten pears after the legal relaxations of 1778, and you will see that I am not supposing a thing which has no precedent in fact ; and yet I can show, I think, that the position of English Catholics since that time has been, in some respects, a more difficult one than it ever was. If you trace the sliding scale of persecution, you will see what I mean. The no-popery persecution in England has had five phases, and is entering upon a sixth ; but the people we are speaking of have not yet had their plasticity moulded by that, and each phase has had its own special effect on those whom it concerned. There were the days of racking at the mercy of the informers, and embowelling alive under a gibbet ; the days of missionary priests, and of those who sheltered them at the peril of their lives ; the days when Margaret Clitherow was pressed to death, and Father Oldcorn was butchered alive by the

hangman's knife. All the finest qualities of regenerated humanity were developed in those days. Heroic examples trained the higher instincts, and temptation had no dignity. Then came the days of social stamping out and moral torture, the days when Catholics were consigned to unnoticed outlawry and hopeless inaction. People learned to cultivate passive sufferance in those days, and to be simply patient, as one learns to lie still under the influence of a leaden headache. They were heroes and heroines in those days, though they were safe from the rack and the hangman's knife, for they bore their mental pressing to death in the spirit of martyrs; but their energising power grew weak, like an arm in a sling. It was hardly their fault, but the fact remains. Then came the days of liberalistic patronage and deceitful offers, when the American War and the Irish Rebellion modified the policy of statesmen, and made them try what a little poisoned honey could do—the days of Dr. Milner and the Catholic Committee. The stamping-out system had done its work to a certain extent: so had Jansenism, Gallicanism, and the great French Revolution. The conduct of not a few showed that in them the martyr spirit was leavened with a half-unconscious spirit of compromise.

Then came the days of emancipation, when bare justice looked like a favour. The change was great, but its effects on those it concerned were slow, for habits alter slowly. Its immediate effects were little more perhaps than preparatory and suggestive: its remote effects appeared later, when the influx of converts, and the consequent numerical increase of Catholics, drew them more or less within the social current of the day. Since then, two effects have become apparent—a good effect on many, a bad effect on some. The good effect is that English Catholics are gradually recovering the use of their energies; the bad effect is to be found in the follies you have been speaking of. The same wind turns the wind-mills and blows chimney-pots off; but the mischief done by the erratic chimney-pots is limited, and the wind-mills grind the corn that supports life.”

“You are right,” said he mildly.

“I know that,” thought I; “but what is the meaning of this unwonted disposition to acknowledge it?”

Perhaps he read or guessed what was in my mind, for he added this qualification.

“But their worldliness is not only awkward, it is absolutely vulgar; and the ladies’ dresses are the most exaggerated in London; and

the manners of the young ladies, both married and single, are rude and flippant."

"Too often it is so," I replied. "They have, as I said, mixed with the Protestant world, and, being inexperienced in its ways, have copied some of its most unattractive models. But what is offensive always multiplies itself in one's imagination, especially when the bad models are commonly seen in a lot, and the good ones are scattered. What do you think, for instance, of the second Miss Arden?"

Just then every one rose to leave the dining-room. It seemed that he took advantage of the movement to avoid answering my question, for he turned away a little, and then, coming back to me as we were leaving the room, said—"I will volunteer to acknowledge that there is in Catholic women a distinctive purity, and that if the people I have been criticising were not Catholics, they would, considering all circumstances, be infinitely worse than they are."

"And what do you infer from that?" I asked.

"That the influence which did so much ought to have done more," he replied rather shortly.

Thinks I to myself, "No, you shall not have *that* last word; so, hurrying after him,

just as he was going to speak to some one else, I said—

“The dodge of unduly exalting a power for the purpose of unduly depressing the merit of its exercise is an old one, and unites the immediate advantages of injustice with the staying qualities of apparent fairness.”

He stopped, as if to answer, and then walked on without speaking to any one. In the drawing-room he sought out the youngest Miss Arden as soon as might be, and devoted himself to her with much carefulness. Evidently he was in love, either with her, or with an idea which she realized; and, for a keen-witted man, he was strangely obtuse respecting her. She was not exactly bored by him, for he was not made of the stuff that bores are made of; but in all civility and friendliness she wished him farther off. Some one else evidently wished him still farther, indeed, out of sight, and that was the young man of whose name he had seemed to affect ignorance when I wanted to know who he was. I happened to notice the fact, and should probably have forgotten it without delay, if Sherborne had not attracted my attention, and caused me to search for the centre of his mind.

One thing I perceived plainly at and about

that time, viz. the incalculable mischief arising from extravagant dress and social impertinence on the part of "strict Catholics," to use a popular Protestant term. I saw it reflected in the words of various people as in a looking-glass, for several people referred to it while conversing with myself unreservedly, under the impression that I was a Protestant. And each of them expressed or implied individually an increase of that complex mis-apprehension which is the palladium of anti-Catholic prejudices in England. It was to no purpose that I showed the injustice and absurdity of their inferences. I might as well have talked to the deer in the park.

The evening passed off pleasantly enough, but with nothing particular to mark it, except that Sherborne, being a sensitive man, and quick of perception, nevertheless consented to play the part of a bore *per accidens* in respect of Miss Winifred Arden.

Then there was a limited migration to a smoking-room, Crayston being among the number, to the disadvantage of everybody; for he was one of those men whose presence is pestilential, and especially so when they speak feelingly. I had hoped that we were rid of him, as his place was not far off; but

it turned out that he was staying two days at Bramscote, so there he was still; and there was Sherborne, but he was in a mild and moody humour, and after coming little farther than the door, he went away under the plea of a headache.

Then Crayston unfolded himself in varying hues, all having the same object, as a tailor displays his book of patterns; but his talk differed widely from what it was when I overheard his dialogue with Mr. Glenfillan Bruff. Liberalistic no-poperyism, fortified with didactic self-assertion, was his little game then, being calculated to insure at once the sympathies and the deprecatory hero-worship of that worthy optimist; but now he took another line, equally well adapted for the purpose of misleading his audience. It may be described as the limited easy-going line, and is very efficacious against the judicial defences of unwary Catholics, who are apt to judge it by rules of interpretation exclusively charitable—which was Sir Roger's mistake on that occasion, or else are in danger of unconsciously tempering their charity with a little pseudo-amiable human respect, as his son, Edward Arden, did, owing to the fact that his ideas had to travel through a certain empty space, and were apt to lose their way sometimes.

"You were speaking of having been at Florence when a boy," said Sir Roger. "You passed some time there, I think."

His manner, as he said this, was simply perfect in point of good breeding, both natural and habitual: Crayston's was polished on the surface and hard underneath. Sir Roger never smoked. He came into the room for the one and undivided purpose of making himself agreeable to those guests who were there. Crayston, too, meant to be agreeable, and he was so: but so are the effects of opium. He made a conspicuous pause of some seconds in answer to Sir Roger's question, and then said in a regretful tone of voice.

"Yes, I was born at Florence. All the pleasant memories of my early life, and all the painful ones, too, belong to the time I passed there. My school and university life had no particular colouring."

"Colouring!" echoed Edward Arden in a low voice, looking much perplexed and pulling hard at his pipe whilst he looked with round eyes at the opposite wall.

His elder brother, who had decorated the results of doing nothing at College by pitch-forking on the surface of his mind scraps from dangerous authors, and amusing his silly, but

not vicious self-conceit with false philosophy, like a child playing with fireworks, shook his head sapiently, and whispered something: whereupon the other replied—

“*I know*. I didn’t suppose he was a painter. But what does he want to talk poetry for?”

In the meanwhile Crayston had gone on to say—

“I have liked a great many places, but I care most for the place I knew best when a child.”

“A good feeling that—shows that his heart is sound,” thought Sir Roger. I know he thought so, for I could read it in the kindly smile that took up its position on his transparently honest countenance. Crayston, too, saw it, and proceeded to angle for the sympathies of the younger generation.

“It’s a long time ago,” he said. “You young fellows have it all before you: *I* have let my chances go by—such as I have had. *I* belong to the generation of men who may maintain what they have gained in the battle of life, but cannot acquire: *you* are of the generation representative, and you will do your work in your different ways; I could envy you—only you are so jolly about it, that I can only wish you success.”

The bait was swallowed in all simplicity. He had gained their good opinion by flattery disguised under the appearance of good wishes; and both of them were too inexperienced to see through the disguise.

To receive undue compliments for something so undefined that contradiction has little to lay hold of, is a trial more or less severe to the self-knowledge of the recipient. How then can we wonder if two very young men, who knew nothing of the world beyond the externals of its amusements and the novelty of its external attractions, arrived at the sapient conclusion that Crayston was a good-hearted, straight-forward sort of a fellow.

"I remember seeing your father at Florence about five and thirty years ago," said Sir Roger. "But I only stayed there two or three weeks."

"Yes, I was at school then. How time does pass!" said Crayston. He repressed a sigh that needed no repression, it being under orders. Sir Roger acknowledged the fact that passing away is one of Time's idiosyncracies.

"I suppose," said Crayston, "that the mixed impressions of my early life are what gave me the sort of two-fold character which I have. The sunny sky of Tuscany made me

sanguine, and my English associations put a chill into it, that gives me a twinge of low spirits and a kind of aching regret for past opportunities every now and then—as it did just now.”

“I think your father had a house outside the city,” said Sir Roger, wishing to be very civil and avoid æsthetics, which thoroughly bewildered him at any time.

“Yes,” answered Crayston. “He lived in one of those many white villas that lie round about the city, and make it seem at a distance very much larger than it is—just like the dogmatic Protestantism of the Church of England, which assumes a mock-catholicity by reckoning the crowds outside its very elastic barriers.”

Sir Roger’s good breeding was on the horns of a dilemma. He must either take no notice of a remark addressed to himself, or break through his rule of never giving an opinion respecting Protestantism in the presence of a Protestant. He turned, paid some almost inaudible compliment to Crayston’s wit generally, and saying that he expected a long day’s hunting the next day, wished us all good-night decisively.

His two sons laughed, each according to this measure, and both of them thought—no

wisely, but too well, of Crayston. But a sturdy old Catholic, who sat next to the eldest (I forget his name, for I never saw him before, and he left next morning) pertinently said—

“If he *means* that, he has no right to remain a Protestant; and if he does not, he must say it either because he has no belief at all, or because he wants to make a fool of you.”

Wise as were his words, their only effect on the person addressed was to make him shrug his shoulders and credit himself with superior perspicuity.

“Your father did not care for hunting and that sort of thing?” asked the younger brother, who, though quite convinced that all this was very fine, felt rather at a loss as to his own share of the proceedings.

“Not a bit,” answered Crayston. “He came to Marleton, and after staying there less than a year, he migrated to Bath, where he devoted himself henceforth to eating exclusively. It was a bad chance for me; there can be no doubt of that. Nothing is much worse for a young fellow than to find that his father is a selfish sensualist of a grovelling type. I am afraid this sounds irreverent, but I had a mother too, and his treatment of her was such that it makes me say things I ought not to say, perhaps. Well, but human beings

—wretched human creatures, with passions and feelings, and dimly defined aspirations, *will* distinguish between sins that are purely selfish and grovellingly safe, and those that are of a noble origin and entail risk. No one respected him, and the nearest approach to toleration was the fat smile of self-complacency from people who felt themselves raised by his being worse than themselves. This was not a good chance for me, and yet, perhaps, I may say in Irish fashion, that it might have been worse if it had been better. Had my father been a respectable average rate-payer, who took his children to the pantomime, and went to sleep in the softest arm-chair whenever there was no one else but his wife to occupy it, I should probably have been worse than I have been."

"Yes—worse," he added with a sigh, when he had given emphasis to the hollow sentimentality by a pause in his speech and a pull at his pipe.

N.B.—By the bye, I have noticed that if, after putting forth, while smoking, some sentiment about home, general or particular, you take a few hard pulls at your pipe, and stare hard at nothing with blinking eyes widely opened, you will be given credit for having what is called "lots of feeling."

However that may be, Crayston's sigh was a real one, and if put into words, it would have said just this:—"I am sorry that I have not lived a better life, because, had I done so, I should be in a better position, social and financial, and I should have enjoyed myself more too, I think, and be likely to enjoy myself longer. Moreover, I have lost irretrievably by losing my freshness of feeling. I can't realize the joys of domestic life, though I really believe them to be the most lasting of any that I can form any idea of. I am sorry, too, bitterly sorry, to perceive how time slips away from under me, as it were, and passes on to the end of all the pleasures I clutch at and hang on to."

That was what the sigh said, but Sir Roger's two sons evidently took it for an instinct of contrition, and pitied him heartily for not knowing what to do with it. So that when—after speaking with a respectful smile on his lips, and a permeating sneer in his voice of some Catholic acquaintance who had fasted contrary to the doctor's orders, he proceeded to assume an easy-going practice on their part—they coloured, and let the supposition (which was not true in fact) go by default.

And that was just what he wanted, whether he was clearly aware of it, or manœuvred by

mere force of habit. I had my own opinion on that point.

“By the bye,” he said, in answer to Edward Arden’s permissive silence, “you were eating a good breakfast one day—in Lent, I think it was—and your father had nothing but a bit of toast, about enough for a robin in a hard frost.”

Instead of saying that he was under the age of fasting (he was only twenty), Edward Arden produced a forced laugh out of his throat, and replied—

“Oh, one needn’t be so particular.”

This tribute of thoughtlessness to human respect went straight into the unsettled mind of one young man in the room, and did a work there which the speaker little recked of. That young man was a distant neighbour, and had come to shoot, dine, and sleep at Bramscote. He had what is popularly called “Catholic leanings,” but like many others in his position, he had a morbid tendency to judge the whole body of Catholic doctrine by the practice, real or apparent, of individuals, and by their idle words, more or less misinterpreted.

“Are you in earnest about that?” he said, and there was a morbid sensitiveness in the tone of his voice that made one feel for the poor fellow, who was in a kind of spiritual low fever.

"Of course he is, my dear fellow," interrupted Crayston. "They are not so straight-laced as you suppose—of course not."

Edward Arden looked ill at ease, but did not explain; his brother put on a manner of pompous indifference and self-containment; the sturdy old fellow, who had spoken up before, now looked bluff, and held his tongue doggedly. I waited to hear what any one might say, and just as I had said to myself, "If no one will clear that bit of road for him, I will," the party broke up.

I went to bed, oppressed with a sense of what I can only call representative responsibility.

"We Catholics of England," I said to myself, "are credited individually with a representative character, which many of us are far from possessing—a representative character which is often imputed to people who, like myself, have it not, a representative character which is ever entailing sudden calls on prudence taken at a disadvantage, a representative character that demands conclusive explanations for people whose minds are closed against them, a representative character damaged beforehand by every lie, every misstatement, every exaggeration, that colours and enlarges the sins, imperfections, short-

comings, and weaknesses of each and every Catholic throughout the world.

Two people passed my door, just as I had entered my room. I heard Crayston's voice : I heard him say to the young man before-mentioned—

“Nonsense, my dear fellow; it's all very beautiful in an archæological point of view, and as a part of English mediæval life. I know that it made people religious and good then, but it's an anachronism—you can see that for yourself; and men don't believe in it, except a few converts who are proud of supposing that they have thought for themselves, and couldn't face the shame of stultifying their own act. Depend upon it the Established Church is really——”

This was too much. I threw wide the yet unclosed door, and said—

“As a Catholic and a convert, I beg to deny the truth of every word you have just asserted.”

“If I had known that I was in your presence,” he answered blandly, “I should not have made the remark—it would have been very ill-bred to have done so.”

He bowed with much external dignity, and passed on. He had the best of it, simply because he was dishonest.

Of course he had that young man's confidence all the more for what had passed. I never saw the latter again, but I afterwards heard that he had married the daughter of a neighbouring rector, and gone into the wine trade.

"Well," thought I, "I have seen several people drawing conclusions, unreasonable, but under their circumstances not to be wondered at, from the sight of a worldly Catholic or two, and I have seen one poor fellow get off the road owing to the results of a thoughtless speech—and all this in one evening. I wonder how much mischief I myself have done by words or example? Who can tell, when one's words and actions glance off so often from some impenetrable prejudice in one's hearer's mind, like a bullet striking against a stone, and go off at an uncertain angle from the original direction!

CHAPTER IX.

THE STORY OF THE OLD LADY WHO LIVED IN
THE HOUSE AT THE FOUR WAYS.

Bob Acres.—Hey, Sir Lucius!—we—we—we—we—won't run.
The Rivals.

I must confess that when my promise to the mysterious old woman flashed across my mind in the cold grey morning, I felt very much inclined to exclaim, with the worthy Bob Acres, "No, I say we won't run, by my valour."

But there was no escape; so I made the best of it, and directly after breakfast went forth with Don Pascolini on our strange adventure. Not wishing the whole parish to know where we were going, I steered in another direction, and we came circuitously to the house without meeting any one.

The house had rather a weird-like appearance. It stood in a hollow, at the junction of

four roads, with a large turnip-field behind stretching upwards, a steep slope of coarse grass in front, a long reach of flat pasture land, of which only a narrow strip was visible, to the right. On the left a turn of the lane shut out everything except a fir-wood on a steep incline, which, when one saw it between the outlines of two hills that narrowed the view in that direction, looked not unlike the edge of a forest. The front of the small house, for such it was in shape and character, being high and narrow, with one attic window in the roof, all but touched the road on three sides, and at no point was more than three or four yards from it. It was indeed a lonely dwelling, and stood in a lonely spot. Mrs. Radcliffe might have chosen it for a scene in the "Mysteries of Udolpho." The walls were partly of flint and partly of mud. The windows were shut, except the little one in the roof. There was no living creature to be seen anywhere, except a hawk flying heavily over the big turnip-field, under a leaden canopy of rain-cloud.

But Don Pascolini took no notice of all this romantic symbolism: his imagination was practically employed on the prospects of our interview with the mysterious old woman. I therefore said nothing to him, but walked up

to the door and looked about for the bell, for a door-bell there was, though all appearances betokened that its office was well-nigh a sinecure. It was wooden, and of the same colour as the wall in which it lay embedded. The rusty wire scraped and squeaked when it was aroused from its long repose, and it sent forth a sharp tinkle, as if resenting the unwonted disturbance.

“What will happen next?” I thought, after the sound had ended, or, more correctly speaking, when the bell-clapper had ceased to strike, and only swung to and fro, creaking as it went. In a few seconds there was a sound of heavy footsteps under a light weight, as of a small person, either decrepit, or otherwise deficient in elasticity. The door was opened slowly, but without any hesitation, and a little old woman, not unlike many others, hobbled up to the opening.

“Is a——?” said I, in a hesitating sort of way, for the whole affair looked so unreal, when judged by the prosaic standard of modern country-life, that I was taken aback at being suddenly called upon to give an account of why I was there.

She made a gesture of assent, drew back whilst we entered the house, and shutting the door, preceded us up stairs into a small sitting-

room, where she left us alone to wait and expect. The furniture was of the late eighteenth century style, and, like all fashions whatsoever, told its tale in silence.

Perhaps furniture symbolises the general characteristics of a period in England as clearly as buildings, literature, or fashions of living—possibly more so than dress, because its changes are less frequent and minute in their symbolism, therefore more perceptible. The massive carvings of the Middle Ages tell of a massive race, in whom sin was strongly defined, and contrition vigorous. The sensual ornamentation of the Renaissance harmonizes well with the revived heathenism which marks that period of sensual refinement and sentimental impurity; the plain rosewood and mahogany of the time between the battle of Waterloo and the Tractarian movement seem appropriate to a period when society was polished and neatly defined, but showed no moral vigour, no aspirations, no design in the battle of life. Again, in the period dating from the Gothic revival—a period marked by a strong Catholic movement and a counter-acting spirit of self-indulgence, we see Gothic carvings and Sybaritic cushions, church stoves of mediæval patterns, fourteenth-century bedsteads in panelled rooms lighted with gas.

Now the period from the American declaration of independence to the end of the great contest with Napoleon belonged partly to that corrupt excrescence of the old world, commonly called the *ancien régime*, partly to the principles of 1789 modified and made respectable. It was a dark period enlivened here and there by smooth surfaces of a dull hue. Men's aspirations were, as a rule, small in scope and mean in design; but there were faint echoes from times long past—echoes unheard afterwards when Europe had settled down into a solid tranquillity, and Catholic governments put their trust in police agents, instead of in God and His Church, whilst revolution bided its time, gained experience, and influenced rising generations legally in schools and universities.

As society was, so was the furniture—dark, relieved by inlaid surfaces of a dull hue; small in size, and mean in design, yet not without a sort of feeble gracefulness and beauty of a gravely meretricious type. The furniture of that period always makes me sad: like the minuet, it tells me of a great social system based on Catholicity, and grown effete through being unfaithful to its own traditions, untrue to itself.

The furniture of the little room was of that

style and date, but small, plain, and dull even of its kind. An oval table of dark mahogany, with thin legs, and small bits of diamond-shaped satin-wood inlaid at the four corners of each leg, stood in the middle of the room. Half the table was covered with a green baize cloth, on which a mahogany desk lay open: on the other half were two or three old numbers of *Notes and Queries*, *The Daily Telegraph* of the previous morning, a back number of the *Contemporary Review*, and several volumes of the latest light literature. One narrow arm-chair covered with dark-brown leather, two mahogany chairs with faded carpet-work on their seats, a small work-table, with a yellow silk bag hanging down between the thin mahogany legs, two octagon-shaped embroidered screens very much faded, one small table of mahogany streaked with satin-wood, near the windows, a secretaire surmounted by bookshelves lined with green baize, and some dark maroon window-curtains of thick damask, old but still fresh, completed the upholstery of the room. The walls were covered with brown flock paper. Over the mantelpiece were two black shade portraits and a stone match-box in the shape of an urn. On either side were two brown, flat bell-pulls, with round handles. On the bookshelves I

observed "Tillotson's Sermons," one of Voltaire's works, "Essays and Reviews," Kingsley's "Yeast," Lamennais' "Paroles d'un Croyant," Hume's "Essay on Man," "Reliques of Father Prout," some numbers of the extinct *Home and Foreign Review*, Boccaccio's "Cento Novelle," Charles Butler's "Memoirs," Richardson's "Clarissa," "The Mysteries of Udolpho," "Manon L'Escaut," "Malthus on Population," "The Sorrows of Werther," "La Frequente Communion," and Rousseau's "Contrat Sociale:" a curious collection to be owned by an old woman living alone in a roadside house, and one that made me begin to wonder whether her possession of it was the result of accident or design — whether it indicated anything or nothing.

But at this moment the object of this inquiry entered the room, and I took to noticing herself, instead of my own fancies. I observed in her less anxiety and more earnestness; less assertion and more dignity; less mannerism and more manner. Socially, she was quite at ease, but her mind was not at rest: therefore, her bearing was graceful, and the lines of her face indicated anxiety. Her bearing and her way of expressing herself were of the last century: they went far to prove that she had lived with well-bred people

in early life, and by herself since, as in fact she had.

"It is very obliging of you to come so promptly," she said. "Will you have the goodness to be seated?"

We sat down, and she did likewise, opposite us, bolt upright, without being stiff, and redolent of times that have left no trace at all on the society of our own.

Don Pascolini bowed; I said that I was happy to have had it in my power to do as she desired; and we relapsed into silence. All at once, while I was wondering what would happen next, she plunged *in medias res*, and grew so earnest, that the last century became hardly distinguishable.

"I am an old woman," she said, "and when I am dead there will be no one to tell what I want to be known, or to do even the little that I can do. Now, I will tell you the facts of the case at once, and then I will ask you to advise and help me; for I want to carry out the just wishes of one who cannot do so for herself, because she is dead."

"Anything that I can do by just means for a just cause I shall be happy to do," said Don Pascolini.

She inclined her head slightly, and proceeded as follows, while I interpreted for Don

Pascolini such sentences as he could not clearly understand—

“That place, Hazeley, on the other side of the hill to the right of this house, belonged to the ancient family of the Sherbornes. The present possessor is not a Sherborne, though he bears the name. The family suffered much, and the property was much diminished, by the penal laws; yet still the property was held together, though the lives, liberties, and possessions of successive owners were in continual danger, and more than one of the family died on the scaffold for his faith.”

At this moment a change came over her countenance—a change for the worse—as if the devil were entering a protest within her against the inferences of her story. She smiled harshly, eliminated from her eyes all appearance of seeing, so that they could not come in contact with ours, and added, as in a parenthesis—

“You must not think that I am going to be a Catholic.”

“Do not fear. I never thought so,” interrupted Don Pascolini in English: after which he relapsed into his former attitude of close and inexpressive attention.

This treatment of the protest rather disconcerted her: she took refuge in what may

be called sentimental archæology, and covered the retreat with feminine special pleading, thus—

“But you might have thought that I had some interest in a family that I know so well—too well.”

Thinks I, “You are a woman still, anyhow.”

“The last possessor in the direct male line,” said she, after a short pause, “died in 1746, just after the battle of Culloden. The connection of those two dates began the train of events I am going to relate. He had not been in any way concerned in the rising; but a friend who was, had stopped one night at his house during that period, which gave a colourable pretext for treating him as a rebel. So the heir, who was a boy at Douai College, was deprived of his inheritance by confiscation; and a first cousin of his father’s, who had turned Protestant, entered into possession as heir-at-law. The rightful heir, then only fifteen, had a sister three years older. She had fallen in love with this cousin, and she gave up her religion to marry him; but she had no direct hand in depriving her brother of his inheritance, as I shall show presently. She survived her husband many years, and died at the age of 86; it was the year before

the battle of Waterloo. She had one son and a grandson living when I was with her. The grandson was a little older than myself."

As she said these last words her voice trembled much, her eyelids fell, and a faint blush passed over her withered cheek. Recovering herself with an effort, she went on to say—

"And now I must make an effort that will cost me a great deal. I am going to tell you the story of my life, in order to show that circumstances, and not eccentricity, have made me live by myself so long; otherwise you might suspect me of drawing on a diseased imagination for what I relate.

"I am well born on my father's side, and by no means the reverse on my mother's. My father, who was the eleventh child of a younger son, was of course poor. He held a small family living, and offended his relations by his marriage. He died in difficulties when I was only sixteen, and old Mrs. Sherborne, who had known him when he was a boy, took me as a companion—or, perhaps I ought to say, she half adopted me. I hated the idea; but beggars mustn't be choosers, they say."

She paused, and appeared to be gathering herself up for an effort. The effort was aided by a heterogeneous influx of feelings—good, bad, mixed, and inscrutable.

“This withered old creature,” said she, “who now trespasses on your kind patience, was once less unattractive—at least Mrs. Sherborne’s grandson, Alfred Sherborne, thought so. But his father would not hear of it. Then he went back to the Militia, which was embodied in those days; and he was forbidden to come home because I was there; and my heart was breaking, and my woman’s pride, or self-repect, or delicacy—call it what you will—had to be ignored, for they kept me there out of charity. One day he rode many miles to meet me by appointment. I dare say it was very wrong of me, but I don’t know much about duty—I never was taught it, except as a thing that would somehow or other bring punishment if it was neglected. I loved him very truly, and I wanted to see him at least once more. I thought I should have died when we parted; for, though I had spoken hopefully to him, my heart was sinking all the while.”

She paused again, but only for a second, and drew a quick breath. Then she pronounced, very distinctly, but in a totally altered voice, these words—

“But people are not killed so easily as I thought—I have lived here fifty-five years. The means of doing so were left me by Mrs. Sherborne when she died.

“How I lived through that time I don’t know, nor how I lived through the first year in this house. All I know is that my body survived, and my mind survived, but my heart was turned into stone. And, now, do you think I am wrong in the head?”

“No,” answered Don Pascolini with decision. I echoed his reply. She bowed slightly, and said—

“Mrs. Sherborne’s brother lost his inheritance, ostensibly on account of the rising of 1745, with which every one knew he had nothing to do, but really because he was a Catholic. I can’t say when the law was last enforced which deprived any one educated beyond the seas in a Catholic college of the right to inherit property in England. It gradually died out in practice, and I don’t know when it was put in force for the last time; but, anyhow, it was not wanted on that occasion. They had a better card to play. There is little doubt, if any, that the cousin helped, in an underhand way, to get the business done; and I fear that the lady let things take their course quite willingly. Their son had a brother and a sister who died young, or at any rate unmarried. His wife had died (I think of consumption) before I knew him. He had only one child—Alfred. I have already mentioned him.

"After old Mrs. Sherborne died, the property went to her son, Alfred's father. He lived there alone for many years, and his death made no impression at all on any one, except the undertaker.

"But I shall shock you," she muttered, with a hard smile. "The fact is, I must have died if I had not grown hard. Oh yes, of course, if I were a saint—but I am not."

Then finding that Don Pascolini took no notice of the challenge, she said—

"He died some years ago at a great age—I don't know exactly how old he was, and he left the property to his niece—the mother of the present possessor, George Sherborne.

"I wonder," thought I, "whether George Sherborne knows the remote cause of his having this estate? If he does, I can understand his spasmodic attraction to the Establishment." I wondered also what became of Alfred, the grandson; but I did not like to ask her, and merely said—

"I have a dim idea of having heard something about the Hazeley estate going out of the direct line, but I never heard how."

"I dare say," said she. "People tell half the truth in everything—in everything, everything."

Whether these last words were intentional

or only an utterance of despair, I cannot say; but I, for my part, could not help thinking that, wisely, in the interest of justice, does the law of England require its witnesses to speak the whole truth, wisely, according to the wisdom of this world, does the Great No-Popery Tradition avoid such dangerous precision. If honest Protestants in this country could but perceive that in the matter of Catholicity they never hear the whole truth, the days of that No-Popery Tradition would be numbered.

The old lady remained silent for a while, and appeared to be absorbed in the contemplation of her own memories. At last she roused herself, not without an effort, and said—

“Now I am going to tell you more about Mrs. Sherborne—you will presently see why. I have said that she did nothing against her brother, but consented to what was done. During the years I passed at Hazeley I was her only confidante—indeed, her only friend; for she saw no strangers, and was very reserved with her two nearest relations, her son and grandson. I wondered at the time why she seemed so ill-at-ease with them; but I understood it well enough afterwards—and so will you. So often did I hear from her what

I am about to relate, that I must have no memory at all if I did not remember it almost word for word. She used to begin in this way: 'Oh, my dear young friend, you don't know what it is (and I hope you never may) to find your conscience all wrong, and to hear a voice tell you it is too late to be of any use. What would I not give to be again a girl, and all that I used to be!'

"One day—I remember it well, we were sitting in her own old wainscoted room—she mumbled something about not being able to pray, and having no one to advise or comfort her in any way; and when, not knowing what to say, I asked her mechanically if she would like to see the clergyman of the parish, she became excited and answered 'No, no! never ask me to do that. I tell you he can be of no more use to me than the parish clerk or the churchwarden.' After that she was silent for ever so long, and absent, taking no heed of anything. At length she went on to speak; and she spoke very slowly, as if she wanted to impress what she said upon my mind. And this was what she said:—

"'I think you know,' said she, 'that my brother was deprived of his inheritance, whilst a boy at Douai, in consequence of the rising

(rebellion they called it, though the monarchy is an hereditary one, and the Pretender, as they called him, was the legitimate heir); and I think I have told you that my father had nothing to do with the rebellion.'

" 'Yes,' said I, 'you told me that once before;' and she replied—

" 'Yes, yes; but I never told you that I consented to the wrong, profited by the wrong, tempted another to do the wrong, silenced every suggestion of my conscience in pursuing the special object that tempted me to wish for the wrong, apostatized from the faith, without even the miserable pretence of having lost it, to gain that special object which made me reckless of the wrong. All this you did *not* know; and it is necessary that you should know it, because you may one day, perhaps, be the means of helping me to make restitution. Ever since my husband died I have secretly tried to find out what had become of my brother. While my husband lived I dared not speak on the subject; he was so violent. He was an unkind and a faithless husband, though for his sake I had in a way helped to rob my own brother, yes—and sold my soul to marry him. For, indeed, I never wanted to have anything to do with the property, only it was impossible for me to marry him without; and

so I did that also, as I would have done anything else, I suppose, for him.'

"Then she told me all about the trials and disenchantments of her married life—a sad story and a long one. She went on with it for, I dare say, an hour or more. The rest of what she said I will read straight off from the notes I made at the time."

She took a small bunch of keys from her pocket, and crossing the little room with a dignity that made it seem a large one, unlocked the bureau. Then she removed a bundle of what appeared to be receipted bills from one of the pigeon-holes, and pressing an invisible spring at the farther end, produced out of a secret drawer below, a manuscript folded up in a letter-cover, as letters used to be folded before the days of the penny-post,* and read out as follows:—

"'And that was the return I met with, after giving up everything for him. Not that I blame him—oh, no! I dare say it was my fault, and it made no difference in my feelings—only I want you to see that wrong-doing never leads to good. I had not been married

* That is, as established in 1840. It appears, however, to have existed in Sir John Vanbrugh's time. See "The Provoked Wife," where Lady Brute's maid says, "Madam, here's a letter for your Ladyship by the penny-post."

many days when I discovered that he only cared for the property, and not for me; but that served me right. Now, my family had suffered much for the faith. You mustn't be offended at what I say. The Parliament had thought it right to make laws against us Catholics that pressed very hard on us, and from time to time they had been enforced by sheriffs, and magistrates, and others in authority.'

"And I," said the old lady, laying down her notes for a moment and addressing Don Pascolini; "I had to reassure her that I was not offended, and would not make any unfair use of her words, before she would proceed—so strong was the traditional fear of persecution among English Catholics even then, and later still, as if they half expected to see the penal laws enforced again, unless they kept very quiet. I couldn't help expressing my surprise at this, especially as she had become a Protestant outwardly when she married, and remained so. Mrs. Sherborne replied," said the old lady again referring to her notes:—

"If you had known and seen what even I, who have been out of the way of these things for sixty-eight years, have known and seen, you would not be surprised. But all that—and none but those who were alive in those

days could have any idea of what it was—all that was as nothing compared with the things that had been. My dear young friend, I assure you those things were spoken of in whispers even when I was a girl. I knew a great deal about them, but not a tenth part of what actually happened; for the houses of Catholics were always liable to be ransacked, and themselves dragged away to prison, so that they were afraid of having written documents; and what written evidence there is, tells but a very very small part of the truth. When I was about twelve years old, a great-aunt of mine—an elder sister of my grandmother's, was at Hazeley for six months or more. She was infirm, and I, as the eldest, sat with her a great deal. She was eighty then, and could remember the days of Titus Oates. But besides that, she had heard her father and mother speak of what happened in their time. She had heard them speak of what they had heard in their childhood from old people about James the First, and Cecil, and Chief-Justice Coke, and Topcliffe the priest-hunter—and it was but twenty years before then that Margaret Clitheroe was slowly crushed to death for refusing to betray the priest who had been sheltered in her house. I don't know that I need talk of these things

though; but old women are garrulous, and like to tell things in a roundabout way. They can't go on straight to the point.'

"I hastened to assure her that I was much interested in all she was saying. She looked pleased at this; and, indeed, all the time she was talking about the sufferings of Catholics under the penal laws she seemed happier than usual, as if the thoughts they suggested gave her relief from others more painful.

" 'Well, then,' she said, 'I will go on with my story in my own way. If the walls of this old house could speak, they could tell you a long, long story of suffering and patience and heroism and holiness and brutality. Under the floor of an attic at the other end of the house is a priest's hiding-place, a few feet long and quite dark. There was another made by cutting off part of the inside of a large chimney: it was entered from the roof; and there was a trap-door to enter the roof by at the top of a large cupboard in another part of the house. You must move the shelves to see it. That one was pulled down by my husband, because he wanted to have a fire in the room, and the wood (for the hiding-place was of wood) would have been dangerous. In those hiding holes, holy priests, living saints, have lain concealed, with no room to stretch

their limbs, and almost afraid to breathe, lest they should compromise the inmates of the house, whilst the vilest ruffians were bursting into ladies' rooms, often in the dead of the night, breaking open boxes, carrying off private letters, and driving pickaxes into the walls for the purpose of bringing those that were sheltered there to the rack, and the gibbet, and the bowelling knife. Yes, my dear, you never heard of that, I dare say; for history has been made to order, and people must not know how the Protestant religion was forced upon the English nation. But those missionary priests used to be cut down from the gibbet, and quartered; and, not unfrequently, they were cut down so quickly that they were still alive—some of them actually spoke and prayed afterwards. Do you wish to hear more? I could give you a much more graphic account if you like—a story which no romance can equal—a story that will draw tears from your eyes, make you turn pale with horror, take possession of your nerves as if a terrible drama were being now played before you, so that at night you would start up from your sleep, and fancy yourself living in the days of Topcliffe. No, no! I should frighten you; and besides, I must get on.

“ ‘By-and-by you shall hear more about

it, and about the days too when I was a girl. Of those days I will only say now that none but Catholics living at the time could have any idea of what they were. They were more depressing, more wearying to human nature, more trying to perseverance, than the days of racks and gibbets and quartering knives. We were, so to speak, degraded from the honour of martyrdom, and had become pariahs in a land where every good law, every great work, every right principle told of what Catholics had done for it. And so things remained, too, after that—but not for me to witness, except from a distance, where I could only guess at the truth now and then. I had inherited the privilege of suffering for the faith, and I had sold my birthright; and what little I learned about those who remained faithful I only learnt from hearsay, without being certain of anything about it except that it was certain to be more or less untrue.'

"Which," remarked the old lady, by way of parenthesis, putting down for a moment the documents she was reading, and addressing Don Pascolini, "I afterwards discovered to be no exaggeration, but rather the reverse; for, when Father Malone was condemned to perpetual imprisonment for saying mass, all she heard of it was that he had got into

trouble through being incautious; and she was assured that it was an unusual occurrence, though I found afterwards that nearly every week from 1765 to 1772 Payne, the informer, had some priest arrested, or took some step in the prosecution of one;* and an attorney in Gray's Inn told Charles Butler in 1780, that his own firm had defended more than twenty priests.† You will think I am going to be a Catholic after that, but I am not going to do any such thing; but that is neither here nor there at this moment.

"Well, Mrs. Sherborne went on to say just this. Here it is in my notes. She said:—

"'Now, my dear young friend,'—I *was* young *then*," parenthesized the interesting, but unpleasant old lady, with a hard curl of the lip—" 'I have a favour to ask,' continued Mrs. Sherborne. 'I believe that my brother remained in France, but during my husband's lifetime I could make no inquiries, and since then there has been almost incessant war; and besides, what could a poor lonely woman do—for lonely enough I was, with my son often away, and myself not caring to enter into anything, and altogether wretched in my mind? I don't suppose my brother is

* Barnard's "Life of Dr. Challoner," p. 132.

† "Butler's Memoirs," vol. ii. p. 64.

alive, for I am very old, and he was only three years younger ; but there may be a son, or a grandson living. Now, what I want you to do before I am dead is this :—and I think that will be soon, and I hope, and I will pray, if I have not lost the power of praying, that I may be reconciled to the Church before I die—only it seems too hard a thing to do, almost as if it had been taken from me by the judgment of God—and first, I must tell you that I have invested for you a sum sufficient to give you an income of three hundred a-year, which I inherited from my mother. So you will be independent. Well, then, what I want you to do is this : they tell me there are some French people staying at Bramscote, the Arden's place. Now, I don't know why, but the idea possesses me that they may be able to give some information about my brother or his heirs. I have been told that they came from the north of France ; and at least it can do no harm ; and if they can tell nothing, ten to one they can put me in the way of making inquiries ; for though the college was seized and all the people belonging to it scattered by the French Revolution in 1793—*that* is only one and twenty years ago, and there must be people in or near the town of Douai who remember some of the people of the college, and

may have heard about my brother losing his inheritance : for those things are likely to be remembered, and the only thing is to get hold of the right people.

“ ‘ You must know that after all the Catholic schools had been suppressed in England, there was a law passed in James the First’s reign by which any one educated in a Catholic college beyond seas forfeited his inheritance ; and, though the rebellion of ’45 was made the pretence, every one knew very well that it was his religion, and nothing else ; and so the thing might perhaps be remembered in connection with the college. Now, I can’t call at Bramscote myself, because I have never been there since all this. How could I ? How could I, under any circumstances, face a family where the father had had his horses taken away out of his carriage because they were worth more than five pounds apiece, and had been obliged to get a written permission from my husband, as a magistrate, before he could go more than five miles from home to be married, whilst I was living in all the material comfort of apostasy, at ease in everything except in heart and in conscience ? And though sixty-eight years have passed since then, and both father and son are dead, I *can’t* enter that house now. I don’t mind not having called

for so many years, oh, no! but I can't meet the eye of the priest. Later I hope and intend; but *now* you must do this thing for me. The best way to do it is this. Go there, and ask to see the priest; tell him why you have come, and ask him either to introduce you to the foreigners or get their answer for you. And *do* go to-day if you can—there is plenty of time to do it.

“ ‘ And if I can hear that my brother or his heirs are still living, I want to make my will in their favour. For, as you know, all this property is mine, and I have power over it by will. Therefore, do go to-day. Only it is better not to drive up to the door; it would make people talk, perhaps, if the carriage were seen there. Stay—you can call at the Rectory; there you will put up the carriage, if they are at home, and after you have sat there awhile, you can say that you want to see Dame Ayres. She was my maid years ago, and she lives in the village: her husband is the blacksmith. Tell her that I was not well enough to come myself—indeed, I feel fit for nothing to-day—and then say you are in a hurry, and slip into Bramscote Park by the foot-path just out of the village. If you are quick about it, you will get back to the Rectory without their suspecting that you have been anywhere else but

with Dame Ayres ; and if you are longer about it than you expect, you can be supposed to have gone into the large wood behind the cottage, and lost your way by getting off the public path that runs through it. Yes, you had better go into the wood after you have left the cottage ; and if you keep at the edge of the wood, and turn to the left, you will come out where there are some wooden steps over the park wall, unless it is altered (but I drove there not many months ago, and it was there then), and a footpath will take you up to the house. Now do go—I will order the carriage to come round at once. Don't say No ! for, if you refuse, you will make yourself an accomplice in the evil deed ; you will be consenting to it, and so call down upon yourself the curse with which Almighty God never fails to visit, in one way or another, those who oppress the widow and the orphan.

“ ‘ Go, my child, and try to help a poor old creature, who is scarcely able even to wish aright, so heavily do the consequences of one sin lie upon her soul, weighing it down till it becomes incapable of making any effort. Oh ! I would ask some of them to pray for me, for I am in the utmost need of prayers. Ask the priest, and the others too, as many as you can,

to pray for one who has almost lost the power of praying for herself, one who, having long refused the grace of God, is weak against the temptations of the devil, and wavers in her will. Don't ask me what I mean by that—at least, not unless you were older, and determined to know. *He* will know what I mean.—Stay a moment.'

"Then she rang the bell, and ordered the carriage. I was about to leave the room to get myself ready, when she took me by the hand, and said—

"'Come with me first: I shall not detain you long. I have something more to say—something to show you.'

"I followed her, wondering what would come next. The whole story was so strange to me: it had set going a train of ideas so new, so contradictory of all I had hitherto been taught to suppose, that I was prepared for anything, and inclined to imagine anything. She took me into a little room or closet, inside her own bedroom, and looking furtively around, closed the door; then she seemed, as it were, to start up from a painful day-dream, and smiled; but the smile was a very sad one.

"'How silly I am,' she said, 'to peep about as if I expected to be taken up as a recusant; but the fact is, my poor child—yes, I call you

so, for you haven't the consolations *they* had who were hunted like wild beasts for their faith; well, I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, or to say anything—it slipt out unawares; but, as I was saying, the fact is, these things carry me back to the days I can remember, and to days that I heard so vividly described that I seemed to have lived in them also.'

"In this little room, against the wall of the chimney belonging to the bedroom, stood an oak press for hanging up gowns. Mrs. Sherborne said, 'I feel very feeble to-day—and no wonder. Will you be so obliging as to help me. There, if you get on this chair, I will show you what to do next.'

"She pointed to a chair that was near, and stood with her eyes fixed on the panelled wall immediately above the press. I got upon the chair, and looked round for further instruction.

"'Now,' she said, 'put your finger or thumb (there is just room) about an inch down behind the centre of the press, and push it hard against the panel—you must feel for the spot—it is at the bottom of the panel, where the flat part joins the framework, about the middle.'

"I did as she directed, and presently found something yield, just like the spring of a secret drawer in a desk. Immediately the

panel slid down into the framework, which was very broad, and disclosed a space about eighteen inches long, perhaps four inches high, and I should think the depth of two bricks, in the back of the chimney. There was nothing in it except one sheet of letter-paper, folded up, but not directed.

“ ‘Yes,’ she said, ‘that is it. That place used to be full of records—records of things that will be denied by-and-by, as many of them have been already. In most places they were destroyed, or not kept at all, for fear of discovery; because no hiding-hole, however small, however well-constructed, was really safe, when every Catholic house was not only in danger of being violently ransacked with a view to discovering such hiding-holes, but was liable to change owners, either by confiscation, the apostasy of the next heir, or the consequences of ruinous fines—not to mention being at the mercy of trustees, who, however, as a rule behaved well. But this was an out-of-the-way place, and though the inmates suffered much for the faith, they ran the risk of keeping many important records, hoping to keep them and the old property, or at least some of it—until at last there came one who destroyed them all.’

“ I couldn’t help interrupting her—I was

so interested in what I had heard, and the interest grew so upon me. I believe that I said, 'Oh, why was that?' or something of the kind. She answered sadly :—

“ ‘He was my husband, and he had had great disadvantages. Well, they are gone; but I remember their contents nearly by heart. Oh, I could tell you much, and I will, if I live. Now, give me that paper.’

“ I put it into her hands, and there was a dead silence for I don't know how long—it is difficult to compute time when a great deal of interest, a great deal of feeling, and a great deal of expectation are crowded into a comparatively short space of it.’

“ There we stood, with a gap of sixty-eight years between us—she, absorbed in the memories of the past, I, standing on the threshold of experience, whose beginnings I already felt and trembled at whilst I clung to them. I was eighteen—she eighty-six; but we were strongly drawn together in sympathy, for I was the only friend she had ever had all through the long years of her married life and widowhood, and she was the first person who had shown me that such a thing as friendship could be. And there are strange inconsistencies of the human heart—at least, we call them so, to save ourselves the trouble of look-

ing a little closer. Why was I so deeply interested in the fortunes of the right line when Alfred Sherborne was the heir in the the wrong one? Because I had made the honour of *his* family my own, and the heroic commends itself to the pride of birth as well as to the sense of duty. Well, there we stood—I still on the chair, she with her eyes fixed on the paper she held in her hand, yet apparently not reading it. At length she said :—

“ ‘During that long gloomy period when Catholics could have no education in England, and forfeited the rights of Englishmen like felons if they got it abroad, so that they could not succeed to the landed inheritance of their fathers, the custom was to send boys to Douai or elsewhere, under feigned names. My brother was sent to Douai under the name of Flaxley—a fact known to no human being but my father and myself, and as there was no such name in any way connected with our family, we felt tolerably secure of his not being traced. Well, he didn’t lose his inheritance in that way, as I have told you already; but he probably would, only the other way of doing the business was more simple, and looked better. Anyhow, this secret was known to him who ought not to have known it—

never mind how; and, what is more important, it would now have no chance of being known by those who ought to know it, unless I had kept a record of it, with a full description of him. I have kept that record up there, in that secret place, for sixty-eight years, and here it is.'

"*And here it is!*" repeated Mrs. Atherstone, taking a paper from under the manuscript notes that she held in her hand. "I have kept them nearly as long as she kept them. Sixty-eight and fifty-five is a hundred and twenty-three—a long while, isn't it?"

Then there came over her countenance that uncomfortable smile to which neither jest nor earnest could prove its claim; and not so much addressing myself apart from Don Pascolini, as causing me to feel appreciably the precise value of the distinction, she said, "There is a difference between those days and these; *you* live in easier times."

"Yes," said I. "*Then* the public was more just than the law; *now* the law is more just than the public. *Then*, a man's neighbour would stable his horses for him, that he might not have them forcibly bought for five pounds apiece; *now* the law permits him to be elected a member of parliament, but the electors take good care not to elect him."

“Here is the paper,” said she, putting on an appearance of non-perception.

She held it out to us, but as it contained what she had already told about the young brother’s age, the name he took when he went to college, a description of his person and the rest, we merely glanced at it, and she went on to say :—

“Mrs. Sherborne then put this document into my hands, which I was to take with me for fear I should forget the name, and said, ‘If they can find my brother or his heirs, and will send a trusty messenger to me with the proofs, I will pay all expenses, and undertake that justice shall be done.’

“‘How can this be without the consent of your son?’ I asked wonderingly.

“‘The property is in my own power,’ she replied. ‘My husband left it so when he died, because my poor son was such a sad spend-thrift, and in his youth gambled much money away. But of course I should leave my son and grandson properly provided for.’

“After repeating two or three times more what she wanted me to do, she hurried me off. There was something strangely impressive in the old lady’s countenance and manner, as she took me by the hand, and, with the nervous strength of her screwed-up

feebleness, dragged me, so to speak, out of the room. It was what I could imagine to be represented by the highest tragic art. Oh! I can assure you that it *was* tragedy, and nothing less. There was grief, and there was remorse, and there was the struggle of inward resolution against despair that rolled in like a tide, and there was the inborn habit of dignity maintaining itself, as it were for its own sake, when there was nothing left to make it worth keeping. Yes! there was all that, and I was impressed by it then; but since then I have sometimes admired and sometimes despised it, just according to the light I saw it in—that is, according to whether I thought she was kept up by self-respect—which you would call pride, and make a sin of, or depressed by what *you* would dignify with the name of conscience, and I should call a morbid condition of mind. For what harm had she done? She had sacrificed everything for the man she loved—and I would have done the same—and I *have*, as far as it was possible for me to do it.”

She paused for a moment, and as she had done several times before, looked at me sideways, to see what effect was produced by thus again giving me to understand that she had been hardened by sorrow, and made “like

sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh." Upon which I caused my countenance to express an exclusive capacity for listening, and she, almost instantaneously relapsing into her previous state of mental absorption in the past, said—

"Yes, I can see her now—oh! it seems but yesterday—standing in that little old room, with the time-stained sheet of paper in her hand, and its queer hiding-place above her, that showed by a square framework of dust the space where the document had lain. Oh! I can revel, even now, old and worn-out as I am, I can revel in the romance that seemed to float in the very atmosphere of those old rooms and long passages. I revel in the poetry that hangs about the very names of the people who lived there and died there—when they didn't die in prison or under a gibbet—and suffered there, and showed courage and constancy and strong patience there. I revel in the memories of the place, and the stories I have heard concerning it, and the dreary imaginings that grow out of them by contemplation. I revel in all this. It is the only interest I have in life. In fact, I'm rather like the German student in "The Pilgrims of the Rhine," who lived his life in dreams directed at will, and vegetated at

other times. Yes, I love and admire those people; they showed grand qualities. But what has all that to do with theology?"

Still I made no sign, though the temptation to tear the flimsy fallacy was great. Nor would I break silence even when she went on to say in a tone half sad, half defiant:—

"Yet, at one moment, I *could* have been, and, *you* would say, ought to have been a Catholic. And then it melted away like shadows of the night—shadows of the night."

"Does it never occur to you," said I, when she had repeated the words with significant emphasis—"does it never occur to you that it was rather a clouding over of the dawn?"

"It's of no use telling me that—none at all, none whatsoever," she answered bluntly.

"I ought to apologize for uttering a truism," said I.

She coloured, and continued her narrative as nearly as I can remember in these words:—

"I started, then, on my strange errand, which was not an easy one, nor devoid of danger, in *one* sense, as you will see presently. Off I set, in a high yellow chariot, alone, but yet hardly fancying that I was so; for I rehearsed in idea my interview with—I knew not whom, the whole way to Bramscote. When I arrived at the Rectory I started, and

for the first time, began to realize the reality of my position, and I wished myself at home; but before there was time for me to think myself into a helpless state of fright, I was in the presence of Mrs. Thomas, her daughter, and, soon afterwards, of the rector. Mrs. Thomas was a little old woman with blumpy features, and a twinkle in her eyes. The daughter looked about the same age as her mother, and otherwise resembled her, except as regards the twinkle, which in her case was of a somewhat fierce character.

“The rector was a hale old man, stout and florid, with bristly powdered hair, and very grey eyes. He had written a book of Evidences, which consisted of some general platitudes about the Deity, and a few mild exhortations to believe in the reasonableness of religion. I knew them all three, but I was not the less put to it when, after talking to them for a quarter of an hour, and then again for another five minutes, as if to postpone the difficulty, I found myself face to face with the necessity of proceeding on foot to Bramscote, and somehow concealing what I was about. What was I to do? If I were to drive there the coachman must know it; and if I left the carriage at the Rectory, one of the three, at least, would offer to accompany me

to Dame Ayres's cottage. If I drove off, and put up the horses at the public-house stables, people's curiosity would be still more aroused; and if I got off without being accompanied and without suspicion, how should I account for the length of time I should have to be away? Well, I cut the Gordian knot at last, as people do when driven to act by instinct. I said that I had to go and see Dame Ayres, and to do one or two other things in the village, and would come back afterwards to finish my visit. I said this so abruptly, and suited the action to the word with such promptitude, that they were all either taken in, or, at any rate, taken aback; and within ten minutes I had been to the cottage, talked with Dame Ayres, told her that I wanted to look for some wild-flowers in the wood, and fairly started on my unpleasant errand. I went into the wood, turned into the path that led soonest out of it, and soon found myself inside the park, walking rapidly along the foot-path towards the house, the chimneys of which could be seen among the trees in the distance.

“And then I stopped suddenly, and began to think of what I was going to do; or, more correctly speaking, different views of it came before me, almost without any effort of mine,

and temptation made my heart beat till the sound filled my ears and shortened my breath.

“For was I not about to aid in transferring the inheritance of my betrothed to a stranger?

“But the temptation gave an uncertain sound as yet, and pictured its advice indistinctly. You shall hear it all as it comes in order.

“I stopped a few seconds only; then I walked up to the house at a rapid pace, and rang the bell. What a noise it seemed to make! But I had screwed myself up, and was not nervous. Not even the awful mystery attached to Catholic houses in the mind of an inexperienced girl, who, when a child, had been told all sorts of queer lies about them, could make my pulse beat quicker; for I was wound up to the point at which the nerves are kept steady by tension. Only when it flashed across my mind—just as the door was opened, by the bye, to make it pleasanter—that I was there as a stranger, whose name and birth would be unknown, I felt a hot flush in my cheeks, and a sudden movement of pride in my heart. But this, after the first surprise, gave me courage—there is nothing like pride to give one the instinct of self-preservation when one is in a disagreeable position.” Here she looked up again sideways, quickly

tried to look as if she had not done so, and added, " So, womanlike, I asked for Sir Joseph Arden ; for I felt that I should be better able to preserve my dignity, under the circumstances, in the presence of a man than in the presence of a woman. Sir Joseph was out, so, as the next best thing, I asked for the priest. The old butler, who had been brought up in the palmy days of Payne the informer, looked at me suspiciously, and indirectly questioned the fact of his existence. But I was equal to the occasion. I said I wanted to go to confession—I, who had the vaguest idea of what confession meant, and who (mind you) later on, turned away from Catholicity because I could not make up my mind to do what I knew I should be told to do if I did go to confession. Well, the old butler, being a pious Catholic, could not find it in his conscience to say ' No ' unconditionally, under the circumstances ; so he said that perhaps Sir Joseph might not be far off—in fact, very likely was not, and showed me into the library. Here I remained a few minutes—time enough for me to examine the room well ; but my heart was beginning to flutter a little, I hardly knew why—I soon found out though—and so it happened that I looked almost without seeing. Presently in came the priest. I forget his

name, and what he was like ; but I remember that he had very fine courteous manners and an ascetic look. Well, I asked him (at once, or I should have begun to hesitate) whether there were any French people staying in the house. He said there were two—a Count (I forget his name) and his wife. I said that I wanted to ask them an odd question, and one which it was very unlikely they would be able to answer, considering the size and population of France. I wished to ask if they knew anything of any one going by the name of Brabourne, and descended from one who had been deprived of his inheritance, in 1746, when a boy at Douai ; begging them at the same time to consider my inquiry strictly secret and confidential, and not to mention to any one that I had made it. The priest said he would ask the question, and left the room. Presently he returned, bringing the Count with him, a high-bred old gentleman of the old school. To make a long story short, what the Count told me was this : He remembered an Englishman who had lost his inheritance in the manner described, and who had taken the name of Brabourne for a fortune. But he couldn't quite remember the name he went by at college. I asked if it was Flaxley, and he replied, ' Yes, that is it.' Well, I was on the

track, so far ; but then he went on to say that he himself had been absent from France twenty-three years, and lost sight of the family. I asked how many children there were. He said three—a married daughter (I forget whom he said she had married), living, I think, in Italy, and two sons, about his own age, of whom he had seen very little since they were boys, they having gone to Paris, whilst he was living at his father's *chateau*. I asked what sort of people they were. He hesitated for a moment, then said that he liked them much when they were boys ; he believed that they had grown up to be estimable men, and the eldest had distinguished himself at college. He was unfortunately guillotined, he understood, in 1793, as an aristocrat. The younger, who was by several years the youngest of the family, had married before the Revolution, and lost his wife within a year. There were no children by that marriage.

“ ‘Then,’ said I, ‘there will be an end of the family—at least, of the elder branch.’

“ ‘I am not sure of that,’ said the Count, ‘for not long ago a friend of mine met him in London, and he told him that he had just married again. He had escaped from France in 1792, gone to India, traded with the fortune

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he had had with his first wife, made money, come to England, married again, and was going back to India soon. His second wife is, I hear, very beautiful. He had met her accidentally. Her father was a younger son with many children.'

" 'Of an ancient family?' I asked, almost breathless—you will see why in a moment.

" 'Yes,' he said, 'of an ancient family.'

" 'Is the name,' said I—'is it Ath——?'

" 'Yes, Atherstone,' he said.

" Oh! then I had heard enough—quite enough to set my head in a whirl, and my heart in a flutter. I thanked him, and bowed myself out as quickly as I could. He offered to accompany me to the carriage. I told him that I had walked; and I hurried away, leaving him, I dare say, much puzzled as to who I was; for I had not given my name, and no one there knew me.

" As soon as I had got a little way from the house, I began to walk very slowly, so that I was twice as long in going back as I had been in coming; and yet the time seemed a great deal shorter—I suppose, because there was nothing to mark it, my brains having been in a hopeless state of confusion all the way. Not till I had returned to the Rectory, made some commonplace remarks, and set

out homewards in the old yellow chariot, did I begin to see what it was that made me tremble and hesitate at the idea of doing anything, and feel angry with myself and every one else. The solemn roll of the old yellow chariot, the solitude of the cross-country roads on a winter's day, the stillness of the frosty mist that hung, grey and cold, over the fields by the road-side, cooled my brains and warmed my energies. I began to see something more than I had bargained for when I undertook to do Mrs. Sherborne's behests. When I undertook that office, I felt as a girl; *now* I felt as a woman. I mean that *then* my feeling about it was simple, and *now* it was complex. Yes! indeed, I began to see something more than I had bargained for. But I must explain one thing first about my own family, otherwise you will not understand why I was taken aback when the Count told me about Thomas Brabourne's second marriage. My name is not Smith. I assumed it, without y's or e's, when I came to this house, because I wanted to be unknown, and leave an ancient family to struggle with the chances of silly representations and scampish heirs, without having its drawbacks increased by me. My real name is Atherstone—Mrs. Atherstone: in my young days unmarried

women when they arrived at a certain age were called Mrs. instead of Miss. Now you see why the Count's words affected me so much. The second wife of the direct heir was my own sister; and here began the tug of war in my heart.

"When Mrs. Sherborne told me (as you remember) that her brother had gone by the name of Flaxley at Douai, it suggested nothing to me; but when I learned that he had assumed the name of Brabourne, it flashed across me that my brother-in-law must be the heir she wanted. Thus, at the time of my conversation with the Count, I suddenly saw too much and too little. Fool, dolt, idiot, that I was! I could only see that, if I helped Mrs. Sherborne to discover her brother's direct male heir, I should be helping to take away the inheritance from Alfred. Don't stare at me! Yes—from Alfred, my betrothed. I little thought that I should lose him by *not* doing so. Don't think I am ashamed of the way I acted. I have nothing to be ashamed of—everything to regret. But you must pardon the garrulousness of a poor old wretch, who has no life except in the past. I can't tell the story I *have* to tell, without giving vent to the memories of my own great sorrows—immense, complete, hopeless. I only

live in *them*. And you mustn't mind—well, you have borne with my irritating digressions of another kind very patiently, I must say—you mustn't mind if I express myself strongly about what I am now telling you ; for I can't speak of it calmly—how can I, when I ruined our prospects and caused *his* death by what I did ? I determined, after a terrific struggle (for bare truth-telling was the one and only principle I had been taught) I determined to keep back the truth, and say that the Count had known her brother's younger son, the elder having been guillotined, but *not* that he had heard of him lately in London. I was very sorry to do so, and though I tried to comfort myself by hoping that he would have no son, and that so there would be no permanent injury, I could only succeed so far as to drown the scoldings of my own imagination (call it the voice of conscience, if you like) in what I considered just anger against everybody and everything for bringing me into the dilemma. I was an idiot to act as I did, because, what would it signify if he *did* lose the inheritance of the property ? It wouldn't make him penniless, and it would have made Mrs. Sherborne do her utmost to remove obstacles which she would then have had the power to do, because his father, as well as himself, would then be dependent on her.

“Too late I knew what I had done; but you shall hear that presently.

“When I reached home, I found Mrs. Sherborne in the same little room where I had left her three hours before. The hiding-place had been closed; but the documents, together with various other papers of the same date apparently, lay on the table, and she was so absorbed in them that she was not aware of my entrance until I spoke. Then she looked up and through me. And I began to doubt and reproach myself, and hate my own thoughts; and then I grew angry, and listened no more to this internal voice, whatever it might be. In short, I cut off my own retreat by saying:—

“‘I saw the Count; I forget his name. He remembers your brother and his wife and three children—two sons and a daughter. The eldest son was guillotined; the youngest son married, but his wife died soon after her marriage, and left no children. He afterwards went to India, and—and it is believed—he—died.’

“Then the poor old creature—no! I shall cry if I let myself talk in that way, she, Mrs. Sherborne, was so affected that she could neither speak nor take notice. Oh! I hated myself for what I did, but I did it: I let

her think that I had told her all; I let the little flickering spark of hope die within her; I left her to the great sorrow which a word could have dispelled. She sank back in the old arm-chair where she was sitting, and covered her face with her hands. She said nothing, but I heard a very low wail, and I saw the tears trickle slowly through her thin fingers. Do you think I relented? No. I hated myself, and took a passionate delight in giving myself cause to do so: ay! and I felt a sort of hysterical pleasure in the remorse under which I was writhing. That day's work was the beginning of the end with her. She felt that she had no other chance, for she had few acquaintances, and her strength had been giving way perceptibly during the last few months.

"With me, too, it was the beginning of the end. I had taken my own line, and chosen wrongly. I felt that I was wrong, but I had not given way when I could, and a few days afterwards Alfred's father heard of our engagement. He had suspected it for some time, and sent him away, as I told you before.

"Some days passed on, and then Mrs. Sherborne sent for me early in the morning, before she was dressed, and looked at me so kindly that I could have torn my own heart

out. She told me that she had wished for the marriage; 'for,' said she, 'I have a great affection for you: you are the only friend I ever had; and you are quite as well-born as he is. But there is no moving my son; for he will listen to no persuasions, and I cannot compel him to give in, because he feels he is in a manner independent of me; he is independent of me because he knows that, although the property is in my own power, he is sure of it. If my brother had *left a male heir, and I could find him out, it would be different.*'

"'How could that be?' said I, trembling all over, as the whole truth rushed into my mind like a flood.

"'Because, my dear,' she replied, 'it would then be a matter of conscience with me to leave the property to him, my brother's heir; whereas, now I am equally bound to leave it to the nearest heir I know of, which heir is my son. In fact, my husband (who had the honour of his family at heart), though he left the landed property to my disposition, bound me so far that I cannot leave it to a stranger if there is a male heir of the family in existence, at the time of my making my will. Therefore my son is now really independent of me, because I am obliged to make him my heir; but had I found my brother's heir, then

my son would have nothing but what I should settle on him of personal property, and I could and would make the amount depend upon his yielding to my wishes; for they are just and right, and it is very disrespectful of him to behave as he does—very.'

"Then she remained silent for a few moments or minutes, I can't say which—it seemed an age, and the expression of her countenance grew ineffably sad, so that it would have been very painful to look upon, if I had been in a condition to feel anything but the awful struggle that was going on within me. You will wonder, perhaps, how there could be a struggle—how I could see before me what few ever see, another chance, and not clutch at it—how I could be able to hesitate when the obvious course to pursue would probably gain for me all I cared for in the world.

"Oh! but human nature uncontrolled is like a straw before the wind; it goes straightforward with the storm, and circles with the current. My heart's best affections were driving me to tell her everything, when a word from her raised a cross current of opposition in me—my pride revolted against confessing the whole truth—I turned aside, and my last chance was gone.

“It happened in this way: Mrs. Sherborne roused herself somewhat suddenly, and said, ‘My dear, did you say anything to the priest about me?’ ‘No,’ I replied rather shortly.

“Now, I was conscious of believing—you see I am making my confession to you; but all that, remember, is past—past, I tell you. Don’t forget that. However, I was then conscious of believing the Catholic Church to be the one true Church. I don’t *now*, because I don’t believe in any religion at all. Oh, yes! and I am not mad, though I must appear to you very flighty every now and then. I can’t help it. I mustn’t cry and break down before I have finished my story. Well, you see I was conscious of resisting my own conscience: do you understand *that*? Conscious of resisting it, because *he* was a Protestant. I loved him with that kind of self-annihilation that sometimes makes a woman give up her soul to the object of her love, partly from intense affection, partly from what would now be called hero-worship; and, in fact, with myself it was not exclusively a question of whether I should lose him or not, though *that* was the motive that determined me, but it was partly the fear of losing him, partly an unbridled passion of casting everything at his feet, and of sacrificing everything

and everybody to what I fancied was his interest.

“I had not forgotten her request. I remembered it all the time I was talking to the priest in the library at Bramscote, and I said nothing. That was the first step in dishonesty of purpose ; this was the second, and the last, too, for the work was done, and when I would have given the wealth of a thousand worlds to undo it, the opportunity was gone for ever. The reason why I had said nothing about her to the priest was a wretched one, but intelligible. I was afraid of his coming, because I was afraid that, if he did, I might somehow be made to see more clearly into my own conscience than I wished to see.

“I was ashamed of having acted so, but I shrank from offering to remedy the evil. If she had said one word, I think perhaps I might have offered to go for him ; but she was weary and weak, and she sat quite silent—how long I cannot tell, for I felt as if the moments were rushing away from me, and mocking my feeble, half-hearted attempts to clutch at them. And then her maid came into the room, and I went away in a state of mind impossible to describe, but never to be forgotten when once experienced.

“She remained upstairs and alone all the

morning ; the maid said that she seemed to be fatigued and in low spirits. Why did I not go to her, and tell her the truth, and offer to repair my neglect? I could easily have walked to Bramscote, I was young and strong, and across the fields it would have only been three miles ; but I was like a person under a spell. Even the time combined to tempt me. It was within a little of the hour at which I was to meet *him*. And so I went, reckless of everything but one, leaving her to the fate which it was in my power to avert, letting my last chance go like a gambler's last guinea.

“ I went to our place of meeting slowly, because I was making an effort all the while to satisfy myself that what I had done had no alternative. I thought I was strong, when I was only trying to drive away the humiliating suspicion that while I thought I was too proud, I was really too weak to confess that I had told a lie.”

“ Now, think what you will—what do I care now what any one thinks? I have set myself to tell the whole story, because the upshot of it is part of a complicated whole, and there is a dreadful harmony in it all which must not be broken. Then the question tormented me, What would he think of me afterwards were he to discover that I had acted so ?

"The bare idea was intolerable when once I stood face to face with it, as I did before I arrived at the spot where we were to meet. I had not realized this before. Now I did realize it—now when I had done the deed, and consented to it twice again, and recognized the weakness that I had thought strength—I tell you it was intolerable to contemplate how I should fall in his estimation, and I was as ready as ever to throw my will in everything—ay, in everything, at his feet. The idea was so intolerable that it almost made me decide to tell all, while there was yet time, both to him and to Mrs. Sherborne, and then go to Bramscote as quickly as possible, to do as I had promised. It would seem that I had my last chance that morning, when I resisted an appeal that might have moved a stone; yet now, within an hour, I had one more—the fourth that had been given me, and this time it came authorized by the one absorbing passion of my life.

"Of course you took advantage of it this time, many people would say. Of course I did not. Of course I shrank again from doing so: when I saw him all was forgotten but the one absorbing idea, and we wasted the time in unpractical declarations of hopefulness, which neither of us really felt. I could

see that he had no belief in the words of hope, which he repeated again and again, to comfort me, and, if it were possible, to persuade himself. I think—I would I were not sure, that he was made reckless by seeing no hope for us. When it grew so late that I could stay no longer without discovery, he mounted his horse, followed me at a little distance, whilst I hurried homewards, and then he rode towards the river. I was seized with a sudden and uncontrollable terror. I ran back as far as I could, and called after him to stop and not to cross the river, but to go round by the bridge, a mile off; and in my agony of mind I said that I had something to say which I had forgotten, something of the utmost importance to us. The presentiment of some impending danger drew that cry of terror from me, and made my heart force my will. I determined to tell him all, and implore him to be prudent for my sake. He pulled up at once; and then I thought he was safe, and I thought I could save him without telling all. So when he asked me what I had to tell, I hesitated, and said that the floods had swollen the river, and made it unsafe to cross.

“‘Is that all?’ he said, in a tone of disappointment which I can never forget—no! not if I were to live five hundred years. Just

then he caught sight of some one on horse-back turning a corner of the lane, about a quarter of a mile off, and he galloped away towards the river. It was too late to call him back then.

“I saw him plunge into the river at the ford. I saw his horse carried away by the flood. I saw the horse slip in struggling to clamber up the loose stones at the side. I saw the horse fall upon him, and get up dragging him stunned and helpless. I saw the horse rushing along in wild terror, partly swimming partly carried along by the current.

“For the first few moments I stood, as it were, fascinated by the ineffable horror of the sight. Then I ran to the river-side and along the bank with the recklessness of despair. I ran, I know not how far, at a speed that would have seemed impossible, and with an endurance very far beyond my natural powers. At length I came within, I suppose, fifty yards of him, and then I plunged into the torrent. I sank and rose again on the dark seething water; then I struggled convulsively, not to get out, but to get on; then I felt a rushing of water into my mouth and ears, and a sense of suffocation, followed by a sudden state of dreaminess, during which my whole life passed before me in an instant. And then I knew

nothing, felt nothing, till I found myself in a cottage, with a doctor and several other people beside me. I had been carried by the current towards the bank at a sharp turn of the river, and been rescued by a labouring man who was passing. I scarcely felt the pain of returning animation, though it is no slight thing, as those who have been saved from drowning can testify; for with the first breath of returning animation came the consciousness of all that had happened. I saw it all pictured with a preternatural distinctness before my eyes, as I lay there—whether on a bed or on the floor I know not. The horrible agony of that moment so stimulated the vital powers, that I recovered myself more rapidly than any one could have expected; and, whilst the doctor was still administering restoratives, I started up wildly, tried to raise myself, and gasped out, ‘Where is he?’

“Oh, there is a horrible quaintness in that juxtaposition of the awful and the absurd which you often see in the tragedies of real life. The labourer, who had heroically saved my life at the risk of his own, and whose honest face was beaming with sympathy, replied, ‘Please, miss, he’s drowned.’

“His words ring in my ears even now. That tinge of the burlesque at such a moment

seemed to mock my unutterable anguish, and say, 'You shall not even have the dignity of woe, for it is not your misfortune, but your fault.'

"I *would* be taken into the room where he lay. I threatened to dash my brains out against the grate (which was close to me) if they refused. I saw him : he was quite dead, icy cold. I remembered nothing more after that till after many days. I had been delirious with some sort of fever, I believe. My hair had been cut off.

"After a time I asked for Mrs. Sherborne, but without caring much what the answer might be. I had lost all, all interest in everything whatsoever, and took what was given me without pleasure or dislike, or recognition of kindness. They told me she was ill—dying. Gradually I understood what that meant, and, bit by bit, the whole story of her kindness to me and my ungrateful return was put together in my mind, like a piece of mosaic, till the vividness of the picture forced from me the resolution to tell her the whole truth now, and go to Bramscote for her, come what would.

"By this time I was able to walk, though with some difficulty, and I went straight to her room. She was evidently very ill, but

perfectly sensible. Bitter disappointment had been her death-blow : what followed had but hastened the end a little. I remembered that, on my return from Bramscote, she was stricken down at once ; and, at the first moment, wondered that the failure of what appeared to be a mere wild-goose chase should have affected her so tremendously. Thinking it over now, after the lapse of more than half a century, I adhere to the conviction which then forced itself on my mind : I was and am convinced that she read me through when I stood before her, withholding the truth on the very spot where she had made her last appeal to loyalty, to gratitude, to the plain dictates of humanity. It became evident to me on reflection, and that for two reasons—her sad and searching look at me, and her appeal to my own interest afterwards.

“And now I was standing by her death-bed—for such in fact it was, though she lived a fortnight after that—watching the irremediable consequence of my own deed, my own deliberate choice, my own by neglect of warnings, my own by repetition. I stood there simply overwhelmed. Grief, regret, remorse, mourning, affection, love, despair, were blended in one tremendous sensation of pain, and continued more or less indivisible for many days ;

the only difference being that, while I remained by her death-bed that sensation was characterized by remorse, whereas afterwards passionate regret was the predominant quality of the suffering by which my heart was tortured till it could feel no longer.

“I went up to the bedside, and told what I had to tell without delay or excuse; and it cost me no effort to do so, for I was calmly reckless. I had no hope whatever in this world or the next, for I had rejected the one—yes, yes, don’t tell me I didn’t, or try to persuade me that I can undo it—I had rejected the one, and thrown away the other; but I had some good feeling left, such as a dog shows towards a person who has been kind to him, and I was perfectly reckless as to what any one might say, think, or do about me. So I said just this:—

“‘I have deceived you. Your brother’s heir is alive—his only surviving son. The Count told me so.’

“‘May God forgive you, my child,’ she said. ‘I dare say you were fearfully tempted, and I, at least, have no right to reproach you.’

“‘But I will at once repair the mischief I have done,’ said I, ‘cost what it may. I will order the carriage this moment, go to Bramscote, make the Count find out your brother’s

grandson—he is in England, perhaps, and bring the priest straight back to you.’

“I then rang the bell violently, and when the maid came running in, breathless, thinking that her mistress had been suddenly taken worse, I told her to order the carriage immediately—any carriage—whatever could be got ready soonest. She stared, but I repeated the order in a tone that stopped all questioning. Mrs. Sherborne looked at me earnestly, and said (oh! I recollect every word she said), ‘Thank you, my dear, for that. It is the one matter that concerns me now.’

“‘But I must get ready,’ said I, for I thought that there was no time to be lost.

“‘Stay a moment,’ she replied. ‘I wish to say one word more. I have told my son all, and implored him to make restitution for me, if he ever finds my brother’s heir, reserving for himself what was his father’s fortune, what was mine by my father’s marriage settlement, and what was his own younger son’s portion. For you know, or perhaps you don’t, that he is the youngest of eight children—all dead; and it has been the same with his children, too—it has not prospered, that evil deed of mine. Now, I intreat you, never miss an opportunity, and if you succeed in finding the heir, remind my son of what I said to him, and if my son

should be dead, tell *his* heir. Tell how ill it has prospered. Tell—oh! you know what to tell; but I fear that he will not do it, still less his heir. I am weak and can talk but little at a time, and I must reserve my remaining strength. Go, my child, and bring the priest. God bless you for thinking of that! Stay a moment. Open that top drawer of the chest of drawers between the windows—the top drawer nearest this way; take out a bunch of keys, and open my desk with one of them—it is labelled. In the desk you will find a paper directed to you. It tells what I have left you in a codicil of my will, which I made six months ago; and also about—having masses said for me—I feel sure that you will do it, and I could trust no one else. Oh! how I wish you would see him yourself when he comes. Now go—my strength will not last much longer—go—as fast as you can.’


“I threw on a bonnet and cloak, ran down stairs, and jumping into the carriage—it was a gig—told the coachman to drive to Bramscote as hard as he could go. He looked at me inquiringly for an instant, touched his hat, and put the horse into a gallop. When we reached Bramscote (and whether the people who met us stared or not, I never noticed) I sprang out,

rang the bell violently, and, as soon as the door was opened, said, 'I want the priest to come with me to a dying person—go and fetch him;' and I stayed in the hall while the servant took the message. The priest was at home, and came instantly. I don't know how three people sat in a gig, but I know that we did so, and we drove back as fast as we had come. I took him to Mrs. Sherborne, and, shutting myself in my own room, walked up and down—I know not how long. I could not be still, though I was so weak that I could hardly stand if I stopped for a moment.

"Well, I am coming near the end of the story—the miserable story which has been trying your patience so long. I will finish it in a few words. The priest remained with Mrs. Sherborne two hours, I should think, perhaps more. She rallied wonderfully, and lived for a fortnight after that. I was with her when she died. I have never heard from my own family since then. I have written many times, but had no answer. Whether they ever heard that my keeping back the truth from Mrs. Sherborne had deprived my sister's husband of the estate, I don't know. I should not be surprised if it were so. But I cannot even be sure that the two persons—he, my

brother-in-law, and the lost heir, are identical. My efforts to discover it at the time were fruitless. The Count had left Bramscote. Mr. Sherborne was very angry when I pressed him to try to carry out his mother's wishes. He said that his uncle had lost the property legally for treason (which was untrue), and hinted that I had trumped up the whole story, or been bribed by my sister to bother him about it; and he talked in the same strain to other people. But I never saw him again. He died many years afterwards, as I think I told you. It was thirty years ago. He was a very old man. He had left the property to a great niece. She was married to a Mr. De Beaufoy who had another property at the other side of the county. I forget the name of the place. She had two sons. Her husband died soon afterwards; she lived with her sons at Hazeley. My health, which entirely broke down after Mrs. Sherborne's death, incapacitated me, for many years, from making any effort to find the lost heir. For many years I never left my room, scarcely my bed. They said I had injured myself internally when I jumped into the river. By the time I was able to get about, Mrs. Sherborne's eldest son was dead. He died in the year 1837, that was twenty-three years

after—twenty-three years. Then the niece came to Hazeley, and lived there till she died six years ago. I said nothing about it to her, because I knew it was no use talking to a woman whose son was to inherit. Well then, she died, and this man came into possession—he was her second son, and he took the name of Sherborne, as his brother had done. I went to him one day and told him all as old Mrs. Sherborne had desired. He got rid of the question by saying that, as the heir had not been found, it would be idle to make magnanimous resolutions. What he would do if the heir were to be found I cannot say. He is not married; and he must be over forty, or thereabouts. They say he had a disappointment some years ago. At any rate I will try him if I can. It is the one object of my life. Now, can either of you put me in the way of finding the heir? I have no friends, no acquaintances, and as a last resource I came up and addressed you both in Bramscote Park. Although I had noticed you and the priest walking with Mr. Sherborne by my house on your way to Bramscote the day before, our meeting last night was quite accidental. I generally steal out towards dark, and on that occasion I happened to extend my walk along the path where you



met me. As soon as I saw a priest, I said to myself, 'Who knows but he may be able to help me? At all events I am sure of being well advised as to what I ought to do'—yes, yes! I know *that*. And when I saw he was a foreigner, I thought I might have two possible chances—the chance of his making inquiries for me in England, and the chance (dim and distant if you will, but still the bare chance) of his being able to trace out something abroad. I have neither friend nor acquaintance, and, as I know that a priest is never surprised, can hold his tongue, and is trained to advise, I followed the impulse of the moment and spoke. Why didn't I speak to the priest of the mission, you will say, as soon as I became sufficiently recovered from my long illness to turn my mind to the subject once more? I will tell you why. After Mrs. Sherborne's death I became hardened. I said to myself, 'My half desire to be a Catholic has only brought desolation into my heart. If I had not felt that half desire I should not have been afraid of speaking to the priest about Mrs. Sherborne when she sent me to Bramscote with that intention; and if he had come to see her, as no doubt he would have done, I could not have ventured to withhold the fact that her brother's heir was

alive and in England, because she would certainly have mentioned the subject to him. Therefore it was not my fault, but the fault of the religion.' That was what I said to myself; and I brooded over it, and hated the sight of a priest, and neglected, as far as that went, her last wishes. For I lived a sort of unspiritual interior life, contemplating the memories of past passions; and it was many, many years before the volcano that was in me became quite extinct. Time, age, and solitude have done their work now; and I had almost made up my mind that I would write to the priest about it when I met you both. Can either of you help me? Oh! don't say you can't."

"The main difficulty in the case," said Don Pascolini, "would be to persuade the man in possession to give up the property."

"Don't be in a hurry, and see only the difficulties. Think it over, and come to me to-morrow. Do, for pity's sake. I am old and very much broken down, though I may seem to be active. I shall not live long. Promise me you will come."

"I do promise," said Don Pascolini.

"You," said she, turning to me, "may perhaps find it more difficult to get away—perhaps you will be out shooting. I think

I can manage after a fashion without an interpreter. Good-bye, and thank you. I am very much obliged to you both."

She rose, shook hands with us, and sank down into her chair, evidently exhausted more than the mere fatigue of telling a long story would warrant. Then getting up again with an effort, just as we were leaving the room, she rang the bell, and bowed gracefully. The same old woman who had opened the door when we arrived came hobbling up to let us out, and we set off homewards at a pace that was not kept up very long.

At the end of the first half-mile Don Pascolini raised his hat on his forehead significantly, and began to step short. Observing this, I slackened speed. He appeared to appreciate the change, but said nothing, nor did I. Not till we were inside the park at Bramscote did either of us break silence. Of course I spoke first, having nothing to say worth hearing; and, as might be expected, I said just the wrong thing, just what I would not have said, too, if I had learned to feel responsibilities before my habits were formed. I said—

"That was a very interesting story; but is it worth while doing anything about her, not knowing what it may entail?"

He made no answer, but just looked up for an instant with an expression of slight disappointment, by which I felt thoroughly reprovèd.

"Then you think you can do something for her?" said I.

"I cannot say yet," he replied.

"In spite of her repeated protests," said I, "I fancy that she has a half-unconscious longing to be received into the Church."

"Possibly," said he; "I hope it may turn out so."

"What do you think?" said I.

"I think you are right," said he.

"But will she follow her inclinations or resist them?" said I.

"If you had seen as much of sin and suffering as I have," he replied, "you would know too well what an unstable thing human nature is to trust it much."

By this time we had reached the house, and on looking instinctively at our watches, found that it was nearly three o'clock.

[Here ends this fragment of autobiography in a manner that reminds one of the symbolical hot potato, so suddenly does Reginald Moreton drop it. His own words give some clue to the reason of his so doing. He said

that he would omit the part of *autos*, in a certain sense ; and he kept his word, for he has described others, not himself. But it is not so easy to remain always an outsider in the drama of life, and he discovered the fact about this time.

CHAPTER X.

[As Moreton's private journal here comes to an abrupt and premature end, whilst the interrupted story, which is indeed sufficiently strange to interest the general reader, has not even begun to develop itself, the Editor (who is anonymous, because he is in no way connected with the events about to be recorded) will continue the narrative, endeavouring, for the sake of unity, to identify himself with Moreton's manner of writing and habits of thought.]

“A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.”

KEATS.

Not if it is a young lady with whom you are hopelessly in love—

As Reginald Moreton thought, while he meditated with much prudence and profundity on that subject, the cause of his meditation being Miss Arden.

Sir Roger Arden had three daughters. The

eldest was a nun in a convent at Ledchester, about twenty miles off; the other two we have already seen—and so had Moreton, especially the elder, of whom he has left us no description at all.

It may be remembered that at the dinner-party, a young man, of whose name Sherborne had with some impatience declared himself ignorant, was observed to let his attention wander definitely away from the lady who sat next to him. The definite attraction was the youngest Miss Arden. But where was the other? Moreton has told us nothing about her, though she was at that dinner-table, among the three or four and twenty people whom he described rather minutely; but he was not so reticent with himself. Exhaustively, to his own mind if not to the subject, did he theorize on the fate of the hypothetical man who should have an unrequited, or otherwise unfortunate, attachment to just such a girl as she was; and, with the comic seriousness of one who is playing with edged tools, he decided that such cases were fatal to the universality of Keats's dictum, inasmuch as, under such circumstances, the thing of beauty would be a grief instead of a joy—a very great grief, so great, that at length, when he thought of it in her presence, and still more in her absence, he

began to find the idea first disagreeable, then annoying, then indefinitely painful. But when it came to that, he said to himself sharply, "Nonsense, to suppose that I should have thought of imaginary cases, as if it were myself all the while."

Having decided thus, to his own disturbance rather than satisfaction, he allowed himself, without let or hindrance, to seek her society and make the most of it; nor did he meet with any impediment, but, as it happened, quite the reverse. For it so chanced that the rest of the party staying in the house had settled down into their talking by a kind of natural selection, as people in country houses are wont to do; and thus it came to pass that, finding his choice often limited, he limited it still further, seeing no danger to himself, but only to some person or persons unknown, who might not be as careful as he was in taking their own heart-soundings. Thus he talked to her a little in the library just after his arrival, more than a little after dinner, much more than a little at various times afterwards, until—— But this sentence must be finished in the next chapter: in this it has no place.

Sir Roger Arden, who retained the spirit, and kept up the practice, of a certain old-fashioned

and inherited friendliness in hospitality, which is now so rare that people would seem to have sold this portion of their social birthright, and left the price of it among the unclaimed dividends, had invited him, not for three days' fatiguing festivities, with a *battue* in the middle and a long railway journey at each end, but for a full fortnight, with a margin to it; and had expressed himself to that effect more than once. This invitation Moreton had accepted with genuine, not conventional pleasure, a pleasure derived as much from the way in which it was given as from the visit itself. For, indeed, it is a pleasant thing to meet a man who has the art of making you feel that he is glad to see you; and it has the peculiarity, which those who suffer from its absence had rather it had not, of being uncommon; but especially pleasant is it when the manner that impresses it is the reflex of a reality within, as Sir Roger Arden's was, and not a fair imitation, which betrays its spuriousness at the first test.

Another guest was going to stay as long—the young man who would not attend properly to the instructive conversation of Mrs. Linus Jones. He turned out to be a Count de Bergerac, and a Pontifical Zouave.

Don Pascolini, too, had deferred his depar-

ture. Of the remainder, some were to return for a ball, after visiting elsewhere, at distances varying from five and twenty miles to three hundred; others migrated finally at the end of the conventional three days. From the end of these three days until the day before the ball which was to take place at Bramscote, Moreton and the Zouave had full opportunities of making their own game, if they had any game to make.

The length of Moreton's visit accounts for the length of the broken-off autobiography, which was written during that time. The immediate cause of his writing it was this: returning late, after his interview with Mrs. Atherstone, and finding, as might have been expected, between luncheon and afternoon tea in a full country house, that every one had disappeared either out of doors or upstairs, he, for want of necessary occupation, began to reflect on what he had just heard; and he said to himself:—

“I will write it all down; for though, of course, nothing can come of it, it is very interesting as far as it goes, particularly those simple records of persecution, in the different shapes it assumed against the much-tried Catholics of England.”

He went to his room and sat down to write;

but after he had written about half a page, the idea occurred to him that the story had better be prefaced by some account of the house where it was told, the person who told it, the cause of his going there, the place he came from, the reason why he was at that place.

And thus he found himself beginning the autobiography which afterwards came to so abrupt an end. By the time he had finished the first chapter, and carefully flattened the pages on some fresh blotting-paper, people were again talking by natural selection in the library, accompanied by the soothing strains of a hissing urn. It was the witching hour of afternoon tea, and Moreton could not choose but talk to Miss Arden; nor would he have chosen differently if he could.

Many people would have thought that their conversation had nothing in it, and yet would have felt otherwise of its effects on themselves. The mountain air refreshes us, though we are so constituted that we cannot see it, and the tone of that conversation would have benefited many hearers who were quite incapable of knowing why. Each not only drew from the other, without effort or self-consciousness, the best that was truly there, but also saw it in the most favourably true light, as when, in the physical order, we see a building bathed

in moonbeams, or a line of distant hills at sunset; and this unconscious insight made them perfectly natural to themselves as well as to each other.

Yet, even in this similarity of feeling there was a difference; for was not one of them a woman, and not only a woman but a girl, and not only a girl but a Catholic girl? The difference of course was this: Miss Arden was natural, but not conscious of the fact as applicable to the occasion. Moreton was natural, and conscious of an external cause for being so. He was not, indeed, conscious about himself in reference to himself absolutely, or in reference to her as individually affecting his self-esteem, which I suppose would be self-consciousness *pur et simple*; but he was conscious about himself in reference to her, and he made the subtle distinction that it was in reference to her separately, not in connection with any feelings of his own. Lucian, in his "Dialogues of the Dead," represents Menippus walking after Cræsus and Sardanapalus, telling them that he will persistently continue to din into their ears, "Know thyself;" a piece of advice which, by that time, they might be supposed no longer to require. He would have been of more use apparently at Moreton's elbow just then, while the "heart" of the tea-

urn was "hissing in steam on its own" square table, and divers people were trying to like the coloured milk-and-water which, in country houses of the period, is sometimes dispensed, with much dignity, between the hours of five and six p.m., under the name of tea.

After a while the party began to disperse, and Moreton with the rest; but there were many more days before him in that house; and he made use of them in a way which caused the limits of time to seem beside the question of the moment; so that, taking the beautiful in a comprehensive sense, we may fairly suppose him to have had a vague impression that "a thing of beauty is a joy for ever."

CHAPTER XI.

“If he be not in love with some woman, there is no believing old signs: he brushes his hat o’ mornings; what should that bode?”—*Much Ado About Nothing*.

A FORTNIGHT or more had passed, and Reginald Moreton, our ex-autobiographer, arose from sleep, on the morning of the last day but one of his stay at Bramscote, not exactly oppressed, perhaps, but at least heavily weighted in his mind. Lord Byron tells us that he woke up one morning and found himself famous. Reginald Moreton woke up, and found himself, not indeed famous, but what comes to the same thing, conscious of an alteration in himself relatively. Why people feel such things more when they wake in the morning than when they went to bed, let psychologists decide; but, at any rate, it happened to be so in the case of Reginald Moreton; and if we say that so it ever is, the experience of every one who has had anything to feel will confirm the

statement. The hopes come freshly before us, like flowers after the dews of the night; the fears are more vivid, for they appear suddenly, and, as it were, out of the darkness; the wounds, if any there be, have grown stiff and sore. Altogether, the æsthetic side of our nature becomes morbidly sensitive, as we open our eyes to the outer world, and take in by involuntary contemplation the things that lay dormant in our memory while we slept.

Reginald Moreton experienced all this. The tenor of his life had been disturbed, and as he woke that morning the disturbance was renewed; the valves of his heart were moved by an influx of remembrances from a point of time, like the sound of a canon-shot that leaps across a chasm and echoes from the rocks beyond. There were two causes of disturbance, but the one was a ripple on the surface, the other an undercurrent, stirring unexplored depths; the one gave him a hint of dramatic possibilities very strange and uncertain, the other made him feel a weight, a chill, and a tremor about the heart by turns, whereat he shivered and looked forth into the morning mist, feeling much but not clearly.

The slight disturbance was occasioned by the strange story he had heard in the House

at the Four Ways, and the strange old lady who lived there. But what was the greater disturbance? What made him shiver and turn pale so suddenly? Something which had changed the current of his life, and made clouds gather thickly in the distance.

If, within the space between the Land's End and John o' Groat's house, there was a woman more adapted than any other to attract a man whose ideal of woman was really high, and not a sickly, morbid dream, it was precisely Mary Arden. Due allowance being made for the weakness of human nature, it was not too much to say of her that she was a comparatively perfect specimen of a young Catholic lady. Moreover, she was beautiful—not beautiful as an angel, whatever that may mean, but as beautiful as any beautiful girl you could find. No wonder the poor fellow felt a disturbance in his mind, and an intermittent chill in his heart, when he thought of her that morning, and remembered what it is that never did run smooth. There he stood, looking out heavily towards the morning mist, so grey and so still, and the trees wet with crystal-like drops of dew that were ready to fall on the dark tufts of grass beneath them at the first movement of the leafless branches. First of all he resigned himself to a little

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hypothetical self-deception, and supposed it possible that he had been impressed, not by the concrete image of Mary Arden, but by the reflex universal idea, in a realistic sense, of Mary Ardenism. Of course, this little straw sank as he grasped it, and then he had to face these two facts: that he was in love with Miss Arden, and that the chances in his favour were infinitesimal: whereupon he made so strong an effort to bear the almost intolerable burden, that all the objects of the outer world grew dim. The sun had risen above the hills behind Ledchester, and the night-dew sparkled as it fell from the trees, when he turned away, and left the room with a firm but unelastic step, to hear mass. When he appeared at the breakfast-table long afterwards, people said, "What is the matter with him?" Noting which, he began to talk much and fast, so that they soon forgot what they had said; and Edward Arden thought him a jollier sort of fellow than he had seemed at first.

But how about Miss Arden herself? When a certain *préfet* apologised to Napoleon the First for not having fired a salute, he headed the list of excuses with, "D'abord il n'y avait pas de canon;" whereupon the Emperor declined hearing the rest; and it would seem no less evident that, if the lady were not

affirmatively disposed, other impediments would be superfluous.

Now here is just the place to make an imaginary analysis of her feelings ; but we will do nothing of the kind : for, in the first place, we have not the remotest idea what they were ; and if we had, a Catholic maiden of the true type is too pure a creature to be made the subject of speculative sentimentality.

Poor Moreton ! It was his last day at Bramscote, and yet he would have to spend a long morning in the society of Miss Arden at Hazeley, where there was to be a luncheon party, probably preceded and followed by expeditions. Anything better adapted than this to torture him slowly cannot easily be imagined. He turned several shades paler when he heard of it, made up his mind to sell the small property he had just bought in the neighbourhood, and walked slowly down to the little Catholic church at the entrance of the village. At the end of about an hour he returned, wrote to his solicitor about the sale, and was ready for the expeditions ; but he trembled when he saw her.

He saw her for a moment only, and from a distance, as he was going downstairs ; yet that moment was quite long enough to make him wish it shortened, whilst he longed for its con-

tinuance ; and here, but nowhere else in this book, there shall be given a very brief description of her. The pure whiteness of fresh fallen snow can only be portrayed approximately, and more than one failure would amount to an impertinence : yet *one* there must be, for I suppose it would seem strange to leave the frame of her portrait empty.

She was of middle height, graceful in movement and in repose, and in that combination of both with expression of feature and instinctive training of charitable tact, which forms a perfect manner. Her figure, though in fact well-proportioned, attracted no attention separably ; her features, though in fact well formed, owed their charm to the chaste light of spiritualized human sympathies that played softly on them like moonbeams on the rippled surface of the ocean on a summer's night. In a word, she was a beautiful example of the most beautiful thing that can be found living in the world—a beautiful girl, Catholic in faith, instincts, and training, beautiful in mind and body, beautiful as a girl, beautiful as a mother, beautiful in old age, beautiful in death. No wonder that Moreton, when he saw her for a moment standing there, unconsciously typifying to his mind and his heart the loveliness that domestic life may attain to,

but seldom does—no wonder, that when he looked on her, appreciated her, loved her, realized all that he dared not hope for, yet could not forget, he hurried away from the contemplation of the terrible contrast: for whether Dante's oft-repeated lines, "*Nessun maggior dolore,*" etc., require a grain of salt or not, certain it is that the immediate comparison of intense happiness with the moral certainty that it will be unattainable, is a trial as much greater than the memories of the past as present pain is severer than the aching exhaustion that remains behind what is past.

Perhaps a few words descriptive of Reginald Moreton, also, may not be out of place here, though it is difficult to find a good reason for describing a man's outward appearance at all. He had finely chiselled features, a well formed figure, rising vigorously to the height of six feet, a pale complexion that grew paler when he thought or felt much, dark eyes with an habitually pensive expression and a latent fire in them ready for an occasion; a broad, rather square brow, a well-shaped head with well-balanced phrenological organs, a graceful unaffected manner, a countenance in which power and repose, energy and gentleness were blended into one, except where there was a special call upon either.

Two or three more ladies were near, for some of the party were about to start on an expedition somewhere at a distance on their way to Hazeley. They were adapted to make quite another sort of contrast in his mind, if his mind had then been capable of receiving any additional impression whatsoever. They belonged to what newspapers describe as the Catholic body, and their own bodies were much decorated with costly silks that swayed uneasily to the tune of clacking tongues, whose utterances were monotonously flippant, pretentiously undignified, vulgarly exclusive. We all know the fable of the ass in the lion's skin; but people like these, who put aside their own proper dignity and superior advantages to make bad imitations of worldliness with swaggering servility, reverse the fable: they typify a very small, inexperienced lion strutting about in an ass's skin, and making awkward attempts to bray properly. These were the people that immediately contrasted with Miss Arden as Moreton hurried through the hall; but he heeded them not; perhaps did not see them.

Just then Sir Roger came up, and asked him how he would like to go to Hazeley. He answered that he would rather walk, as he wished to call at his old home, Fernham

Rectory, on his way: which was true in a sense, though it was not the true reason of his electing to walk alone. Alone he walked, however, without waiting to see whether any one would join him; indeed, hoping to be left, not in peace exactly—for that could hardly be, at least as the term would commonly be understood under the circumstances—but undisturbed, or, as colloquial English would exactly express it, “by himself.”

“I am a fool,” he thought—perhaps it would be more correct to say mentally affirmed—“I am a fool to take this impersonation of an ideal for a reality. The fact is, that she is, or seems, nearer some half-defined ideal of my own than others who have fallen in my way; and so I become enthusiastic, and then, because I should have no chance, up springs a romance at once, and I fancy myself miserable.”

But the fact remained that he was in love with Miss Arden, and it simply annihilated his theory, which only lasted till he was within a hundred yards of the lodge. Then he hurried on, and tried to put thinking into abeyance, but quite failed to do so; indeed, the more he tried the farther he found himself from success. The effort only sharpened his attention.

One thing did, for a time, not indeed take his thoughts, but divide them; it was the recollection of Fernham, the house in which he was born. He must go there, and it was on his way to Hazeley, and he had just said that he was going there, and, moreover, in a certain indistinct sense, he desired to do so; but he began to walk slowly when the village became visible in the distance through the lodge gate, and he turned aside, as if to gain time. It so happened that the circuit he made took him through the small gate by which the old woman in the lonely house had gone when a girl of eighteen, with the power in her hands to mould the one great event of her life for good or for evil. He remembered the circumstance as he passed out into the wood, and then he began to meditate—or rather, listen mentally to what came into his head respecting that strange history and the question it had left unsolved.

“I cannot tell,” he thought, “why this story begins now to interest me so much; for as to the question who John Sherborne’s male-heir may be, it has no practical bearing at all. The present possessor of the property is legally entitled to it, and he certainly would not entertain for a moment the idea of doing a thing that the world would call Quixotic

and laugh at—especially when he could say, and perhaps truly, that he did not believe the cock-and-bull statements of a crazy old woman, who had lived alone for half a century, about another old woman who died half a century ago; and her brother, who very likely died young, or was never born, seeing that there is no authentic evidence about him whatever, except the crazy old woman's account of what she alleges to have heard from the other old woman and from a Count Somebody. That is what he could and would say, though, as a matter of fact, the old woman is *not* crazy, but has her wits about her more than most other people, and evidently tells what she knows, as well as believes to be true. Certainly it is a curious fact that no one has prospered in that house since John Sherborne was dispossessed of his inheritance—no direct heir of the man who supplanted him has lived to inherit; but then it may be said that such things will sometimes happen where no wrong has been done, and not always where it has, all the evidence in Spellman's 'History of Sacrilege' notwithstanding. So that, in fact, if John Sherborne's heir were to turn up this day and prove his identity, things would remain precisely as they are. Yet the story is extraordinarily interesting—full of pathos."

The village of Fernham, where Moreton himself had been born, was about two miles from Bramscote. He came upon it at a turning of the road, and recognized the chimneys of the Rectory between the leafless boughs of some beeches. Involuntarily he slackened his pace, for the image of Miss Arden had just begun to float before his eyes again, and impress his heart from within a clear atmosphere of its own, almost as powerfully as if she had been present. The interest he had been trying to feel in the question about John Sherborne's heir, and had really felt in Mrs. Atherstone's own story, had taken up just enough of his attention to make him realize more vividly that which expelled it and again mastered him. It mastered him again for a while—that was why he slackened his pace; and then—so strange, at least apparently, are the vagaries of impulse in suffering human hearts—he began to muse in a dim and dreary manner on both subjects, mingling them with recollections of his childhood as he drew nearer to the Rectory.

But here we come to a point at which a new chapter suggests itself.

CHAPTER XII.

Nescio quâ natale solum dulcedine captos
Ducit, et immemores non sinit esse sui.

OVID.

THE ancient Romans, like all respectable heathens, had a good deal to say about love of country. They felt and, to a certain extent, understood it thoroughly. But then *religio loci* was limited in two ways: it was of course in the natural order only, and it cannot with propriety be said to have included the idea of home, as we understand the word.

What we mean by the word "home" presupposes a state of things in which woman plays a part that she can never play in a society that is Pagan. Paganism, with or without a mythology, can produce female slaves and strong-minded heroines: it can never produce a true wife and mother, dutifully strong through love, and gently influencing for good those who come within

her sphere. In England, thank God ! home, in the Christian sense of the word, is still to a great extent a reality ; for we are a retentive people, and three hundred years have not sufficed for the total uprooting of Catholic principles. A ray of the supernatural still lights up the natural beauty of a virtuous humanism in many a household whose inmates would be indescribably astonished and scandalised if they were told that it comes from that which they have been trained to misrepresent on principle, and hate mildly. What will become of domestic life in another generation, if the influences now wildly working continue, is a question which fathers and mothers had better ask themselves before it is too late : we have only to do with the time-ranging between Moreton's childhood and the period of which we are speaking.

When Moreton was a child, the house in which he was born could justly claim, without prejudice to its next inhabitants, the title of Home. His recollections of it during his early childhood were pleasant, and their effect morally advantageous when he had entered otherwise unarmed into the battle of life. Perhaps it is not too much to say, that they sowed the seeds of that yearning after the objectively true, which afterwards led him

up to the Church. In the mind of a little child, all that its mother teaches is objectively true. Not only have the first simple ideas of religion, derived from a good devout-hearted mother, a real objectivity, because they are really true as far as they go, but all other things learned from the same source are taken as such by the child; for a little child knows nothing about opinions—it simply believes, as a Catholic does in matters of faith. Whatever remains of definite religious belief among the Protestants of England, is mainly, if not altogether, owing to the little Bible stories they learned from their mothers.

But we are now concerned with Moreton's early home, his parentage, and his history, up to the time of his visit to Bramscote.

Moreton's father was, in the first place, a thorough gentleman; and, lest that comprehensive term (almost as comprehensive as the Established Church) should be misunderstood in the present instance, we may as well define in what sense it could fairly be applied to him.

We understand the term "gentleman" in two senses—as signifying (rather vaguely sometimes) a certain social rank, and as expressing certain qualities which we attribute to that rank. In the latter sense it has three

meanings. First, it means graceful manners and social tact, as ornamenting a solid religious and moral nature, not as a decorative addition, but as part of its solidity; secondly, it may mean agreeable manners and social skill, strongly built into a foundation of honour and Pagan virtue; thirdly, it may mean the faculty of making one's own selfishness harmonize with that of other people in a calm and dignified manner. Of these three types, the last is common enough—quite enough and rather more: the second was characteristic of a school that began with wigs, was at its height during the reign of pig-tails, and went out with flannel shirts; the first, if it be a school at all in these our days, is reduced like a school of small boys, broken up by some infectious disorder, and represented by a master or two and a few solitary scholars.

To that school Moreton's father belonged. Left an orphan when but a few months old, he had been adopted by a lady, a widow without children, who brought him up as her own son, and left him all her disposable fortune—about a thousand a year. Affectionate, simple-minded, accustomed from infancy to see Protestantism in its most attractive and specious form associated with what he justly loved and respected, he drew out of the depths

of his invincible ignorance a large amount of Catholic intention, and acted upon it, quite unconscious of what it was, or whence it came. His graceful manners and social tact were a solid and an integral part of this, and therefore he might be called a gentleman in the sense first mentioned.

He was twice married. His first wife had a daughter, who had married some lustres ago, and lived in a distant county. Moreton had just been staying with her when he came to Bramscote. By his second wife he had a daughter, who died early, and a son, Reginald—the poor fellow who was now making an appeal to one set of feelings in order to divert his attention from another, and whose life, up to the time of which we are speaking, may be told in a very few words.

He went to a public school and into a regiment of the line, served in the latter about two years, and then, reviewing his income one day in juxtaposition with matrimonial eventualities, emigrated to Australia, where he remained until, at the end of rather less than three years, a small unexpected accession of fortune enabled him to retire from a mode of life which had not begun to be at all profitable, and which he had long since begun to dislike emphatically. As he had no family

ties—his father had died soon after he entered the army, and his mother a year afterwards—he did not stay in England on his return, but set off for Italy in less than a fortnight after he had landed. Then, at the age of twenty-four, he in a sense began life anew; for he said to himself, “My life has been made up of unfinished beginnings, from my school-days until now.” Then he read much and thought more, and conversed with many people; and craving distinctly to know that truth for which he had previously longed with a vague disquietude, he received in Rome the gift of faith; and then he felt at rest, so that he could afford to be satisfied with having no prospect of ever making his mark in the world. He remained abroad three years more, travelling much, but passing some time in Rome, to his great satisfaction and advantage, and then returned to England. How desperately he now tried to wish that he had not done so.

The sight of his old home, as he drew near to it, and recognized in rapid detail its familiar features, was a sort of counter-irritant for a limited time, relieving his deeply-seated sorrow a little, just as long as it could keep his active attention, and that was no longer than the length of time he remained within the premises.

The rector was Mr. Linus Jones, whose acquaintance, as also that of his oppressively popular wife, we have already made in a former chapter. Both were at home, and in walked Moreton, drawing a long breath to steady the unequal beating of his heart as he entered the house where he had seen his father and mother for the last time. Whilst awaiting the entrance of the worthy rector and rectoress into the drawing-room, he looked round, and involuntarily compared what he saw with what he remembered. The room looked smaller and newer. Instead of the old odds and ends of Georgian mahogany, made almost picturesque by shabbiness, admixture of Dresden china, and the dark shadows of trees and high laurels growing up close to the windows, there were papier-maché chairs of Lilliputian size, walnut-wood tables symmetrically laid out with knick-knacks from Barry's, an upright pianoforte by Oetzmann and Plumb, and a low book-case, edged with green velvet, containing among its foreign literature, "*Les Paroles d'un Croyant*" in ominous proximity to "*Ecce Homo*." On the walls were hung prints of three distinct sorts—religious, sentimental, and Landseerian—framed accordingly. The religious pictures were in Oxford frames, and were as follows:

Ledchester Cathedral, the state bishop of the diocese, the three irrepressible chorister boys with their mouths open, a portrait of Jeremy Taylor, the ex-Père Hyacinth, Ary Scheffer's "St. Augustine and St. Monica," a cross with a text growing out of some flowers, Edward the Sixth, and Doctor Döllinger. There were three of the sentimental sort, in frames of very dark oak slightly carved, viz. Millais' "Black Brunswicker," a poacher in gaol, and a country lad making love unsuccessfully to a girl standing against the wall of a cottage. The Landseerian class was represented by the well-known three horses drinking, a Skye terrier sitting up on his hind legs under a parrot-stand, and two or three Highland scenes. On the large round table in the middle of the room were *The Evening Standard*, *The Guardian*, *Le Maudit*, the last volume of Dr. Hook's "Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury," Miss Braddon's last novel, a printed Report of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, Mr. Ffoulkes' "Divisions of Christendom," "The Christian Year," and a thin volume bound in green morocco and entitled "A Garland for Garibaldi," by Hermione Alberta Crumps. Moreton gave a rapid glance at these things in detail; then the room and its contents faded

away from his mind, and his eyes no longer took note of them. He saw what his memory raised up, not what was physically before him.

This day-dream of the past, whatever might have been its natural duration, was soon interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Linus Jones. That sweet and superior woman received him in such sort that, under pain of seeming to judge rashly, he would have been compelled to say what he did not feel as to her words and manner. She thanked him for his visit, depreciating herself oppressively in fat tones that breathed forth patent self-consciousness from a wide expanse of visible personality highly scented with musk. Then, throwing into her eyes an expression of regretful sympathy, she said—

“I always feel so much for the children of clergymen—especially when I think of my own little ones, who may one day come to visit their old home, no longer theirs, as you have done to-day.”

Moreton winced a little internally, but only replied—

“Not yet, I hope.”

Then she said, “But I forgot—oh! I beg your pardon; it was the last thing I intended. I ought to have remembered that—that——”

“That what?” asked Moreton, though he

knew perfectly well what she meant ; for he said to himself, "I object to having an allusion swallowed up in a hiatus."

"Oh, you know," she replied, turning down the corners of her mouth, and curling them up again.

"How should I?" said he.

"Oh, of course," said she, "I mean—but I did not wish to say it."

"You began to say it, whatever it may be," was his provoking reply.

She coloured slowly, and said nothing, but sighed with emphasis.

Moreton's countenance clouded suddenly, and he said in a low voice, firm, yet rather forced, and slightly altered—

"You mean that the associations of my childhood must necessarily have lost their power over my feelings, because I am now a Catholic, and then was not."

"I didn't put it so," said she.

"No, but you meant it," he replied ; "and, considering the unfathomable ignorance concerning the Catholic faith, practice, history, and habit of mind, in which Protestants (myself among the number when I was one) are carefully trained and instructed, by means of histories, novels, poems, plays, operas, pictures, newspapers, periodicals, lectures,

sermons, and conversational gossip of every sort, from heavy Puritanism down to a style which respect for the presence of a lady forbids me to name, I am not surprised at your confusing Divine faith with natural affection. Now, should you like to know what I really *do* feel about these old familiar scenes of my childhood, and how far they have even acted on my inclination against my will, on my judgment against my reason, and on my imagination against my faith ? ”

She stared, and sat down, holding her garden hat in one hand, smoothing her hair with the other, and trying to look proudly unintelligent.

“Because,” said he, “I am sure that you would like to hear the truth, and equally sure that you never have.”

Feeling that she had brought the unwelcome information on herself, she assumed a listening attitude, with her eyes fixed on the carpet; and Moreton, in a clear voice, proceeded to impart that information. He said—

“One thing alone held me back, not for months, but for years, from taking the step which the grace of God and my own convictions compelled me to do at last; and that thing was simply the enormous power of early associations, interwoven with my best feelings,

happiest memories, and earliest impressions of goodness. I loved this place as I never can love any other. There hung around the grey walls of the old parish church an atmosphere of bygone Catholicity, which made my affections cling to it as if it were living, associated, as it was, in my mind with the position of my good father, who, but for the ignorance of Catholicity in which his faith had been imprisoned, would have been as admirable a Catholic in fact as he was in natural dispositions. If any power or influence on earth could have kept me back from becoming a Catholic, it would have been the local associations connected directly and indirectly with the Establishment. And as for what I feel—standing here, in this house, so full of sweet memories, and no painful ones—this house where I last saw my father, my mother, my sister, all dead, and the place so changed, yet so suggestive of what it was—why I tell you I could cry like a child, sob on the floor, and lie there forgetting your presence and even your existence. Do you understand the difference between Divine faith and natural affection now?”

What her reply would have been if Mr. Linus Jones had not entered the room at that moment, we have no means of ascertaining.

She composed her countenance quickly, from which fact the reader may infer, if he will, that it had been discomposed, and said blandly—

“My dear, Mr. Moreton has been giving me such an interesting description, of his childhood, and all about this place, you know.”

“I am sure that nothing would give me greater pleasure than to show you round the old place,” said Mr. Linus Jones to Moreton. “Or perhaps you would prefer to walk round by yourself? Pray do now. I dare say you would like to visit the rooms you remember so well, and to go all about the grounds.”

Moreton thanked him, but hesitated.

“It is late now,” he said. “George Sherborne has a large party to-day, and I am going to lunch with him at Hazeley.”

“So are we,” answered the rector.

He left the room, and returning quickly, said in a low voice to Moreton—

“You will not be disturbed. I have given orders about it. You will not meet any one.”

“It is very kind of you; I will not keep you long,” answered Moreton; and off he started, saying to himself—

“It is the last chance—I shall never come into this country again.”

But he did keep them long, though he

fancied he was hastening. He wandered through the rooms and well-remembered passages, now moving rapidly, now standing rooted to the spot, now pushing on again, seeing all, yet scarcely raising his eyes. He wandered through the grounds, and stood still awhile, looking about him, but taking notice of what he remembered, rather than of what he saw. More than half an hour had elapsed when he turned towards the house, saying half aloud—

“I *MUST* go back, I suppose, or it would seem rude.”

When he entered the drawing-room, painfully anxious to make his escape as soon as possible, he found not only Mrs. Linus Jones without her more tactful husband, but Miss Hermione Crumps to boot, largely dressed and energising in an oppressive manner about haunted rooms.

“Am I to go through that dinner-party again without its distractions?” thought he.

But they had it all their own way: sorrow had made him indifferent to annoyance.

“Oh, you know Hazeley of old—you must show me the haunted room,” she said; “the room we were talking about the other night at Bramscote, you know. You *must* show it to me. Now, don’t say there isn’t one.”

“Hadn’t you better come with us?” said Mr. Linus Jones, entering the room, watch in hand. “You will be late if you walk—it is a quarter to one now, and we have plenty of room.”

And the end of it was, that Moreton arrived at Hazeley in a wagonette with Mr. and Mrs. Linus Jones and Miss Hermione Crumps—a situation which plainly demands that this chapter shall come to an end.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Quoique leurs chapeaux sont bien laids,
 God dam ! moi j'aime les anglais."

BÉRANGER.

PERHAPS when Béranger wrote these lines Englishmen's hats were uglier than Frenchmen's—perhaps they were not: but the female hat of the present day, when raised up on the top of a chignon, and leaning forward like a man craning at a fence, is portentous. Its expression is ungraceful and conspicuous, repelling, and, at least negatively, immodest: it takes from the wearer half her attractions, and apparently all her mental freshness, in short it would seem expressly devised for the purpose of seeming to have eliminated the qualities that form the distinctive charm of girlhood.

The luncheon party was numerous. Not less than a dozen people had come from Bramscote: neighbouring houses had sent

forth guests to the number of, perhaps, twenty more. The rooms were bristling with female hats of the period. In one or two cases the lady infused her own expression into the hat; in some, and they were the most numerous, the hat imposed its own character on the lady. Two or three ladies there were who, though unable to infuse any expression of their own into their hats, because they had no expression to infuse, at least did not reflect in their countenances the tone of their millinery. These last were Catholics—very silly Catholics, and they were morally separable from their millinery, just because they were Catholics. Their millinery was vicious, and no amount of meretricious dressing could make it otherwise. They looked very silly, and the jerky pretentiousness of their manners plainly showed that they were as weak in mimicry as in wisdom: nevertheless, if any one had judged them merely by the example they gave in their folly, the judgment would certainly have been unjust, for it would have missed, not only what was best in them, but what was more truly theirs than the acquired absurdities that stuck to the surface of their reality like barnacles on a ship's keel.

And if any one, thus rashly judging, felt inclined to generalize yet more rashly from an

ex parte opinion, the presence of the two Miss Ardens must have suggested not only a very different sort of generalization, but also more charitable possibilities as regarded the others.

The two sisters resembled each other, not only in countenance and what countenance reflects, but even in features and manner: still there was a difference in favour of the elder, and Moreton idealized not a little upon that fact in connection with a very high estimate of the younger. If we were to go no deeper than the surface of his appreciation we might appropriately suppose him to have realized the meaning of those beautiful lines in *The Giaour* :—

“ She was a form of life and light
That seen, became a part of sight,
And rose, where’er I turned mine eye,
The morning star of memory.”

Perhaps he did so ; but he realized a far deeper meaning. He realized that which consoled him as a Catholic, whilst it almost broke his heart as a man: he realized the interior loveliness which animated and characterized her visible beauty: he realized the obligation of being worthy to have loved her.

And so he went through the slow torture of that luncheon-party, sitting, as at the dinner-party, between Miss Hermione Crumps and

Lady Alicia Grubhedge, whilst Miss Arden, exactly opposite, was talking to Count de Bergerac. The presence of the latter seemed unwelcome to his host. He looked past him, towards him, away from him, and was evidently thinking about him uncomfortably. It may be remembered that soon after their arrival at Bramscote, Moreton asked who he was, and that Sherborne turned away, saying, "How should I know?"—an answer suggestive of ill-humour too sudden to be causeless. A cause there certainly was; but what was it? His own obtrusive attentions to the younger sister on the evening of that day seemed to account for his dislike of the stranger, who was a formidable rival, by reason of his religion and the lady's marked preference, not to mention that he was twenty years younger than Sherborne; but why care about him now, when he is devoting himself to the elder sister as attentively as if he had never seen the younger? And what could *that* mean, by the bye? Was Count de Bergerac a mere trumpery flirt? or, did he make so much of her because she was the sister of the other?

These questions might naturally have occurred to Moreton, seeing that, as the phrase goes, he rather went in for observing people and things; but they did not. He saw Mary

Arden, heard her voice, thought of her. Her presence was to him exclusive, so that he spoke at random, and listened without attending.

At length a simultaneous sound of chairs in motion, followed by a rustle of petticoats, and a momentary lull of voices, told that luncheon was over. Several ladies at once came forward, and reminded Sherborne of his promise (which, by the bye, they had extorted from him) to show them all over the house: upon which, inasmuch as he led the way, though under mute protest, there was a general crowding to the front, every one wanting to see whatever was to be seen, and few caring what it might be. Moreton followed with the rest, and so did Miss Hermione Crumps.

But she asked him no more questions about the haunted room; and, as much as possible, avoided speaking to him. Her woman's instinct had supplied the place of discernment, and given her tact for the occasion.

How he and others got through the expedition, we shall see in the next few pages. This chapter seems to end naturally with a question, which the intelligent reader will no doubt have asked ere now, viz. Why did Moreton give up all hopes at once and, so

to speak, finally? Cardinal Richelieu said, "There is no such word as 'fail';" at least, he says so in the play, for I have heard Macready and Charles Kean deliver the sentiment in a thrilling manner; and if that is not historical, why what becomes of the "*Bénédiction des Poignards*," in "*The Huguenots*," which we have all of us seen on the stage as real as life, the chorus dressed as monks and nuns, holding the daggers aloft in time to the music, and bawling with all their might? And if the very word "impossible" has no existence (which, as one says it, reminds one of the Irishman who said, "I'm not here at all,") why suppose the reality of the thing itself? But, however this may be, why, at least, did Moreton so far forget the ancient maxim, "Faint heart never won fair lady?" as to assume that his case must of necessity be a hopeless one. There are, at least, three possible solutions. That he had overstrained his sensitiveness till it was out of tune; that he resisted his own feelings because he knew their force, and dreaded the consequences of allowing himself to be deluded by false hopes; that he had some real or fancied means of knowing what the result must be. The two first of these suppositions give us the real clue to his state of mind; and, once arrived at that

condition, he exaggerated his own fancied unworthiness and the smallness of his fortune, until he became persuaded that Sir Roger must refuse him the hand of his daughter, even if the young lady herself could be induced to look favourably on him. But there is another question, which, as it must have occurred to the judicious reader, ought to be stated in connection with the preceding. What chance did Sherborne suppose himself to have, when religion, age, and the young lady's very civilly marked aversion, were patent facts? His perseverance would have almost made one suppose that he had boundless confidence in the persuasive effect of his own talking powers, for he literally persecuted her and her father with conversational diplomacy, perhaps on the principle that "some Cupid kills with arrows, some with traps."

There may yet be another question in the reader's mind. How came it that Moreton, who had lived to the age of twenty-seven years without losing his heart, and who appeared to be a very unlikely subject for dramatic sentimentalism—how came it that his affections had got out of hand in so brief a period? But, perhaps, the puzzle is only apparent. Can an absolutely exclusive attachment be formed before its exclusive object

is seen? Will a man love the less because he has not previously made speculative attempts to do so? Does his heart arrive at the certainty of its own feelings by a slow process of induction?

CHAPTER XIV.

"Οὐχὶ δευρά; τὸν ἐμὸν οἶκεῖν δίκον οὐκ ἐδόσμαι."

Iph. in Aul.

THOSE energetic ladies who had insisted on lionizing the house—there were three of them, and Mrs. Linus Jones, the model matron, the irrepressibly popular neighbour, was one—had not proceeded far before they tacitly undertook to lead the way and pronounce a colloquial panegyric on its beauties. Sherborne had evidently intended to have got out of this domiciliary visit, for his brow had clouded over, in spite of strenuous efforts to look pleasant before Miss Winifred Arden. He tried hard to persuade his persecutors that they had better get through the other expeditions while it was light, and he told them that there was nothing to be seen in the house worth looking at. But his remonstrances were of no more avail against their cheerful misconstruction than waves against a sea-wall; and when they

had thus got the better of him, they were so exuberantly pleased with the idea of being able to extract, somehow, a few thrilling tales of ghosts, and monks, and murderers, and love-sick heirs, and damsels working tapestry, to the end that good and evil, God and mammon, the antiquity and poetry of Catholicism, and the vested interests of the Establishment, should blend into a pleasantly mystifying unity, that their excitement soon began to steam itself off in vague loquacity and legendary generalities.

In wishing to see the house they had exhibited good taste, whether they possessed any or not. Hazeley would have repaid the notice of any one, with the exception of those who believe in decorators and makers of shining steel fenders, for it had the inestimable advantage of having been left alone during the worst period of taste. The dreadful Boldoni, who went about sticking up square masses of red brick on flights of stone steps, had not had the chance of pulling it down; it was uncared for in the days of stucco, and escaped somehow the perils of experimental Gothic; so that it was genuine, and, like all houses similarly circumstanced, had a character of its own. There were bits, here and there, of the old wall, that might have been

in existence before the wars of the Roses had enabled a race of toadying courtiers to succeed the barons of England, and cringe and steal in the name of the Gospel; there were bits even traceable, perhaps, to the fourteenth century. But the period that characterized the house as a whole was the latter end of the fifteenth. Long, low, and regularly unsymmetrical, with gables of varied size and form blending into perfect harmony of design, it had evidently been rebuilt in the reign of Henry VII., evidently had not been touched since, except for necessary repairs. The diamond-shaped lattice windows, too, through which light entered softly, and softly shadowed the deep recesses made by the inside wall, told the same tale; so did the massive oak beams, and the small carved panels, and the deep chimney in the hall, and the heart-of-oak rafters in the roof, and the low ceilings that could not have been six inches higher without perceptible injury to proportion.

The furniture was of a mixed kind—that is to say, some of it, including two or three bits of tapestry, was of the same date as the rebuilding of the house, and the rest had been added as required—some in the reign of Charles II. or James II., and some as late as the first and second Georges. There was

nothing newer except a few small tables and thick silk window curtains and hangings, which appeared to have been made about eighty years ago, and some of the furniture in the bedrooms.

The mixture of styles, incongruous in principle, was scarcely so in practice, possibly owing to its having arisen from the necessities of wear and tear; for necessity, being above the law, may be supposed to do no wrong, and therefore, not to offend against the laws of taste; possibly, also, because time, by mellowing even the latest of those fashions, had brought them into a kind of negative harmony. Altogether the house and its contents bore the stamp, not only of age, but of that which age alone can give, yet gives not always in the same degree—the silent accumulation of unwritten and, perhaps, unremembered histories, histories often of trials and sufferings wilfully incurred or wilfully caused, histories in which sin and sorrow are the text, and happiness the occasional notes.

By this time they were in the gallery, a long large room upstairs, running about ninety feet along the southern front of the house, looking down upon the terraced garden, and far away over the distant undulating glades of the park. It was filled with rare old

cabinets, china, and family portraits, and had a beautifully designed, rather than ornamented ceiling, with oak carvings, from which at intervals hung pendant bosses, with shields and other armorial devices, the colouring of which time had softened, but not impoverished. It so happened that the dates and the quality of the pictures curiously corresponded with the family history as affected by the pecuniary action of the penal laws. There were some very fine portraits of the Holbein period, several original Holbeins, a cavalier by some inferior painter, a lady tolerably painted in the style of Lely—but certainly not by Lely himself, and a lady and gentleman of the time of George II., very badly painted. In other words, the Catholic owners of Hazeley after the Reformation could, as a rule, afford neither the expense of having a portrait painted, nor the risk of introducing a stranger into the house for that purpose, except when there was an interval of comparative security, and they could find some one who would paint very cheaply. But, from the time when the estate fell into Protestant hands, in the manner described by the old lady in the desolate house at the Four Ways, the vacant spaces were filled with portraits of portly people by Reynolds, Gainsborough, Romney,

Lawrence, and others only second to these in their day; nor did the list end but with a full-length portrait of the present owner, and one of Sir Hugh de Sherborne, the Crusader. It is needless to add that this last was a fancy portrait, painted about the middle of the nineteenth century for the present owner's mother, who, be it observed, had taken to the Puseyite persuasion in her latter years; which leads me to notice, parenthetically, the fact that a certain vague hero-worship of the middle ages is often to be found co-existent with a total misapprehension of what they were, and a chronic state of irritability regarding the Faith which made them so—nay, even co-existent with the open profession of modern liberalism. People who applaud Bismarck, and would shake hands with Garibaldi, expand with self-conscious satisfaction at the thought of some remote ancestor, who, if he had come across such men would have cloven their skulls with his battle-axe.

“Oh, what a love of a Crusader!” said Miss Hermione, who would have been just as ecstatic if it had been a picture of Mazzini.

Several other people spoke to the same effect, though in terms more prosaic. Sherborne looked really pleased, for he valued his ancestry to the verge of excess. It was his

weak point, and, at the same time, one of his best.

“Where is the haunted room?” said Miss Hermione to Sherborne.

“You must ask some one who is better informed on those matters than myself,” he replied. “I never heard of one.”

The question evidently annoyed him, and though he tried hard to make the best of it, its effect on his countenance was not what he would have desired under the circumstances; yet he might have saved himself both the trouble and the annoyance: the lady on whose account he felt the one and took the other did not even perceive either. She was dimly aware of being besieged, and wished that some one would raise the siege; but her mind was quite void of any defined impressions about him. Miss Crumps perceived that it was useless to seek information from Sherborne; but she had begun to energise again in the matter of the marvellous in general, and was not going to be discouraged easily. She turned to Moreton, forgetting that she had recently seen cause not to do so, and said—

“Isn’t there an old woman near here who knows all about it?”

Moreton was too miserable to be taken aback. He replied without hesitation—

"There *may* be. Does she ride on a broomstick?"

But a woman is not to be put off so. She answered at once, "I am sure now that you know, by your answering in that way."

"As a boy I knew this country very well," said he; "but I have never been in it since my father died till last week. I never heard then that any old woman knew anything about a ghost here or elsewhere; and how could I possibly have heard of it now, when no one but yourself has spoken to me on the subject?"

"I don't know about its being possible," said she; "but are you sure that you have not heard anything of the kind—anything strange and mysterious about this place?"

"I have from you," said he, hoping that some one would interrupt them.

"No; I mean from some one else," she replied, making herself appear to know all about it.

"How could I?" said he, trying to look as if he had nothing to conceal.

"By hearing it from the old woman," said she.

Moreton started, or thought he did so. "Is that a random shot," said he to himself, "or an effort to verify a suspicion, or an attempt

at extorting from me by surprise an admission of what she knows? But how can she know? There was no one with me but Don Pascolini, and no one to be seen either when we went in or came out. Can the strange old lady who told us the story be a monomaniac, and make confidantes of other people besides Don Pascolini and myself. It really looks like that."

"Well, then, you *did* hear it from the old woman?" said the pertinacious Miss Hermione.

"How am I to free myself from the questionings of this dreadful woman?" thought he. "Suppose she really has heard something about it? Some fellow round the corner may have seen us come away from the house, and picked up or guessed something more. Will nobody interrupt us?"

Mr. Linus Jones did so, by calling his sister-in-law's attention to the carving of a chimney-piece.

Moreton had been grateful to him that morning for an inadvertent but well-timed interruption: he was immeasurably more grateful now.

He slipped away under cover of two or three fat people, and, falling back among some strangers, he remembered no more about the interrupted cross-questioning and the subject

of it—so suddenly did his own great sorrow rush again into his mind like a flood that has been dammed up; for a great sorrow it was—perhaps the greatest sorrow simply that could have fallen to his lot.

Any one who has ever had chloroform applied to his temples, when suffering from violent neuralgia, will not forget how it burned him, and how the neuralgia went on all the same, so that he felt two distinct sorts of pain at the same time, the one attracting most attention, the other taking the most out of him. Now this was just what Moreton began to experience as he walked through the crowd, shrinking from every one, avoiding notice, noticing no one except Miss Arden, and endeavouring to wish himself far away. The house and its history distracted his mind: it could not relieve his heart.

Presently they came to a small passage with a door at the end. Miss Hermione Crumps muttered, "Law! I shouldn't wonder if that were the haunted room," and led the way, followed by three or four large ladies. Moreton followed, saying to himself, "I shouldn't wonder if the little room beyond, that I remember formerly, should turn out to be the little room where Mrs. Atherstone says that she saw the secret place in the panel."

"I am sure it's the haunted room," said the irrepressible Hermione, who had found her way in. "It looks just like one—it does, I declare. And look there at the great window-seat. *That* could never have been made for any good. I dare say there's a skeleton inside, if the truth were known."

"I should be sorry to interrupt your conversation," said Sherborne, with a slightly sarcastic emphasis on the words; "but if you wish to see the steam-saw, and the Roman encampment, and all the things that I was told to show, there is no time to lose."

The ladies went hastily in quest of new sights. Moreton remained for a while in the little room where old Mrs. Sherborne had told her pitiful tale of weak wickedness, and sorrow miserably merited. That pitiful tale seemed almost real to him, as he lingered behind and looked at the old press described by Mrs. Atherstone, and the unaltered panels on the wall.

"It must be true," he thought, felt, or suggested to himself, and could not tell which. "It must be true; for certainly she was sane, and I suppose no sane person would have told the story in the way she told it, if it were not true."

The sound of voices died away, but he

lingered still, asking himself at intervals how his interest in the vicissitudes of that house, with which he had no concern, as far as he knew, could be kept up at all while Miss Arden was under the same roof.

“After all,” thought he, “the whole story may be the fiction of a diseased fancy. Imagine a person living fifty-five years in that plastered house at the junction of four roads, with a fixed idea and a maid-of-all-work! How one would invent and muse on one’s inventions till one believed them to be true! But, really, knowing George Sherborne well, too, I feel as if the old lady’s confidences had made me a sort of conspirator *volens volens*. It is a good thing that I am going away to-morrow; I shall have no more of her and her cock-and-a-bull stories. Is she mad, I wonder? It would seem so, by her supposing that there is any chance of George Sherborne’s giving up an inherited property because an eccentric old lady swears that his great-great-aunt wished it to go in another line, though she left neither will, nor codicil, nor any sort of document to that effect. He would be a fool if he did, and I should be something worse if I troubled my head any more about it. I wonder what Don Pascolini thinks. I don’t remember that he said anything to indicate what he thought.

He appeared to feel more interested in her mind than in her story. I will ask him—but he is not here, and he leaves Bramscote to-morrow. Oh, what does it all signify to me! Of what consequence is anything on earth to me now!” And to prove that nothing on earth was of any consequence to him, he turned pale suddenly as the words came into his mind. Then he hurried away, guided by the distant sound of many voices, but turned yet paler when he saw Miss Arden talking to the Zouave, who was devoting himself to her with a quiet earnestness, highly symbolical of some special right to do so. Moreton at first stood motionless, his heart resenting the conclusions of his will, so that humanity struggled much within him, and asserted itself in protests that quickened his pulses, and made the blood rush up to the roots of his hair, all his resolutions notwithstanding; then he turned aside and became talkative among a small crowd of people waiting in the hall for their carriages, and finally, after looking at his watch, but not at the hands of it, went off as if in search of somebody’s carriage. He left the house at a rapid pace, in the direction of Bramscote, while most of Sherborne’s guests were going to see a model cottage, a view of the next county from a hill-side, a Roman

encampment, and a steam-saw. How much amusement and instruction they derived from those sights has not been ascertained; but, when they had all gone back to their own homes, their host uttered an invocation, more forcible than parliamentary, in connection with the names of the three stout ladies who had insisted on the domiciliary inspection.

“And bothering about it just as if it were the Castle of Otranto,” he said, lighting a pipe overmuch, till the tobacco fiercely upheaved and emitted a shower of sparks.

That evening there was to be a ball at Bramscote, “a sound of revelry by night,” and the next morning a general departure of guests, not for a field of battle, but to the railway station. The two events affected Sherborne and Moreton differently. Sherborne said to himself with emphasis, though not aloud, “The sooner they go the better, if it includes—the Zouave.”

And Moreton, standing still for a moment, as he turned out of sight, said aloud, “The sooner the better, because it forces me away from where I——”

Of these broken sentences the one was, and the other had better have been, unfinished.

CHAPTER XV.

“But, oh, how bitter a thing it is to look into happiness through another man’s eyes!—*As You Like It*.

Few passages, even of Shakespeare’s, touch a more responsive chord in the human heart than this. Moreton, whose heart was as sad and desolate as it could well be without reproach of conscience, felt the truth of it intensely. Earthly happiness, in the truest, purest sense of that term so often misused, happiness that includes, induces, or suggests, the highest duties of people living in the world, he saw through another man’s eyes; and he felt that it was a bitter thing indeed. True, the imagined eyes through which he saw this had no corresponding reality; but some time elapsed before he found out that the Zouave’s attention to Miss Arden at Hazeley was on account of her sister, and when he did, his first impression may be rendered in these words:—

“Does a certainty become an uncertainty by a removal of its fulfilment a little farther off?”

Pleasantly to all but to him the dinner passed off—so runs the common phrase, as if the pleasantest moment of a pleasant time were its termination. Pleasantly to all but him did the intermediate time pass, the time of preparation and expectancy, when every one looks and feels pleased, because pleasures in prospect are rich in promise, and not within reach of disappointment. Pleasantly to all but him the hours went by after the ball had begun, till the rooms were deserted, and the sound of the last carriage wheels had died away along the avenue.

Strictly speaking, perhaps, we ought to except Sherborne also, inasmuch as, in his rivalry with the Zouave, he was nowhere; but, in fact, the force of a fixed idea had so fascinated his fancy, that it usurped the duties of common sense, and enabled him to maintain, by the support of artificial self-assertion, a negative confidence as long as the lights and the music lasted. How he felt when he was driving home, at three o'clock in the morning, through a frosty fog, is another affair.


The ball was what might correctly be called

a very pretty one: everything you saw was fresh and moderately pictorial. The walls had lately been repainted; the curtains were sufficiently new to be fresh without being highly coloured. The mild brilliancy of many wax candles made each object stand out like a stereoscopic picture, well defined, yet soft at the edges. The young ladies, too, were pretty in more instances than a few, and their collective effect was really charming in its own measure and degree, though somewhat vague, perhaps. It left a general impression of camellias, and jessamine scent, and golden masses of hair, and dresses of many soft hues, and blooming vitality radiant with smiles.

There were about a hundred and fifty people present, the majority of whom lived in the county, and came, some from their more or less distant homes, others from different houses in the neighbourhood. All the people whom Moreton had met on the day of his arrival were there. Some of them were very much there, if their own consciousness of their presence be taken in evidence of the fact. Sir Bertram Fyfield played the part of himself with great fidelity, to the edification of the emptier-headed sort, amongst whom Sir Roger's second son was again

more conspicuous than he could have contrived to be under any other category. Crayston had it all his own way this time, for Sherborne was too much pre-occupied to interfere with him; so he and two or three others talked their sparkling trash, in the interests of social rottenness, whenever they had a chance of doing so. But we have had enough of him; and the use of such people in description is like the employment of the hangman in real life, a necessity not to be admitted too often.

There was Mr. Linus Jones, rather overshadowed by the ponderous virtues of his wife, yet holding on with befitting dignity to a character of his own, and not at all a bad one either. There was Miss Hermione Crumps, from whom, when he saw her, Moreton turned and fled, for he feared her cross-questionings. There was Dr. Shale, who knew all about the pre-Adamite man; and there was his wife, who meditated mildly on his erudition. There was Mr. Glenfillan Bruff, the optimistic man who enjoyed so comfortably a comfortable estate, and a comfortable family living in a comfortable house, and who had such a comfortable confidence in the natural disposition of things to right themselves. He was half-bred, and he showed that he was by the pre-



ponderance of polish over habit. His respect for what he called "family" was great, but he looked on the traditional obligations of the same (which, by the bye, he got in a mutilated condition, owing to the manner of its transmission) as adapted for mottoes and rhetorical figures of after-dinner speech, rather than for practical use in everyday life. This sprightly little man, appreciating, after his fashion, the enjoyable advantages of the time being, agreed with everybody, as far as he could do so, without committing himself to any fixed opinion. He sympathised with Sir Thomas Grubhedge against the payment of Catholic chaplains in workhouses and gaols, and he assured Sir Roger Arden that he lamented the extravagances of *The Rock* newspaper; but no one could say that he had committed himself to a decided opinion on the principles involved in either case.

Then there were those Catholics whose absurdities had excited Sherborne's virtuous indignation when he had nothing else to discharge his pent-up annoyance at, respecting whom we might say, "*Non ragioniam di lor,*" etc. But as we have had that quotation before, we will merely take the advice of the "*dolce pedagogo,*" and pass on.

We stop awhile in the doorway—the natural

position of those who neither dance nor talk, and we watch the pretty scene—for a pretty scene it is, whatever the school of Democritus Junior, *Cui vitam dedit et mortem melancholia*, may say to the contrary.

To say that the round dances and free-and-easy customs of modern ball-rooms are favourable to manners and modesty on the whole, and do not tend to wear away that chivalrous reverence for women, which, if a young man has not, he begins life with mind and heart diseased, would be to make an assertion more conspicuous for its boldness than for its conformity with experience; but there is no denying that the fresh bloom of girlhood, seen with its effect heightened, not altered, by attractively picturesque dresses and a clear mass of soft light, is a very pretty thing to look at.

And no doubt every man did, according to his measure, perceive that it was so, whether distinctly aware of his own impression or not; every one, that is to say, except Moreton, to whom the whole scene appeared, not indeed distorted, nor discoloured, but apart from him, separated by his own removal from the orbit of that little world. To him it truly was as if it were not.

Two practical difficulties arose without delay.

How could he not dance with the ubiquitous and ever energizing Miss Hermoine without seeming rude, or dance with her without stumbling over some of the unlucky questions that she was sure to ask persistently? And how could he not ask Miss Arden to dance, or, if he danced with her, keep silent?

With both these difficulties—difficulty is no word for the last, he dealt in a practical manner, as might be expected (though, perhaps, it would not) from the state of his mind at the time; for really deep feeling is practical, and makes the mind so. To escape from Miss Hermoine's questionings without seeming rude there was no way but the pardonable, though not quite original fraud, of coming conspicuously towards her, and carefully getting himself into a dead block between two resolute dowagers, a servant carrying a tray to the musicians, and a tall, bearded curate talking to a stout young lady of aspect fierce; which is just what he did two or three times, with variations of detail, according to circumstances. And he did it gravely, almost stolidly, from blind instinct, not even seeing the grim absurdity of the thing. This went on for nearly an hour, when, finding himself near Miss Arden, he obeyed an impulse that would

not be struggled with, and asked her to dance. It happened that she was disengaged, and when the next quadrille had begun, he was neither able nor willing to escape from a position in which pleasure and pain could be recognized, but not distinguished.

At first he could say nothing, think of nothing, but trembled inwardly, and laboured without intention to regain the power of utterance. Shakespeare's words, "cold obstruction," can alone express the state in which he was, and in which he then believed himself to have remained very long, though it really lasted an unappreciable time, so intense was the effort he made to force himself out of it. What he said, when he did speak, (whether accidentally, or through unconscious cerebration, who shall say?) was just what he would have been likely to feel under the circumstances. He said—

"How the people crowded in one spot at Hazeley after luncheon! and not for a short time, but all the time, so that I—one—nobody could get to—anywhere."

Now, if that meant anything, and had to be translated into its only possible meaning, it would stand thus:—

"I care for no other woman in the world, and I feel that I have no chance; there-

fore I wish you to believe that I intend to seem as if I didn't care ; and, at the same time, I don't wish *you* to believe that I don't care."

And, if any man, being exactly in Moreton's position could act otherwise at such a moment, he must be very, very—something or other. He must possess the self-control of a saint or have no feeling at all. But then in the one case he could not, and in the other he would not, have been exactly in that position.

Miss Arden looked up with that charmingly natural expression of interest which is so delightful to every one except to the man who would like to monopolize it, and dreads the answer he expects it to give. It was the same expression which, till within the last four and twenty hours, had appeared to him so simply charming that he could not have realized the possibility of any accidental change in his admiration of it ; and now, when her beautiful eyes were raised as before, their pure light, colouring what it rested on, as the rays of the harvest moon colour the landscape where it shines, he looked nervously down and about, dimly seeing through his eyelashes the handle of her fan, and the glove of the hand that held it. But she was speaking, answering him ; and he must again say something, without

being better prepared to say what he meant, or clearly knowing what he meant, than before. She said—

“Yes, I saw you in the distance just before we came to the portrait-gallery. But you went away so early.”

Moreton was now at his wits' end, and nearly at the end of his self-control. “I saw you in the distance,” and “you went away so early,” rang in his ears, and his heart vibrated as he recalled the tones of her voice immediately after she had spoken. He idealized those tones after the model of irrepressible wishes.

“God help me!” he said within himself, and the exclamation seemed audible to him, so that he held his breath involuntarily, as if he might be overheard.

“I went away, because—I couldn't stay,” he said.

And then, because her beautiful eyes looked, or appeared to look, puzzled as to the meaning of what he had said, he repeated the words more nervously than before, adding—

“And I couldn't stay because I was—I thought—indeed, I felt it was impossible—as it was—I could not—ought not——”

Mary Arden turned her head almost imper-

ceptibly away, and her long eyelashes fell over the eyes that just before had looked up with childlike confidence. Those four broken sentences, and the sudden loss of power to control his own words, or hide the expression of voice, look, and manner, told a tale whose meaning no woman could fail to understand.

Whilst he was reproaching himself for what he had said, yet trying in vain to see how he could have resisted the impulse to say it, there was a slight change of colour in her cheeks, a pale pink hue, too gradual for a blush, and then a settled paleness that might have been caused by fatigue, or even by the colour of the light where she stood; for the window curtains behind her were green, and the light was rather strong.

The dance ended either just then or soon after; but he could neither measure that time nor remember how it passed—so protracted did it seem while it lasted, so short when it had gone by. He spoke no more, made no effort to speak, yet was unable to tear himself from the spot. She, too, remained silent now, and by degrees moved—whether instinctively or in consequence of pressure from the crowd which was beginning to expand after the dance, who can tell? Such an instinct in such a

girl is like the rose-tint of the early dawn on a summer's morning: you can appreciate its pure and inimitable beauty, but you can neither see the light itself, nor trace the outline of its reflection.

Some one came up, and finding her apparently disengaged, began talking to her. Moreton drew back with a sudden effort, hesitated for a moment, and fixing his eyes in a resolute, almost dogged manner on the ground, left the ball-room.

"What have I said?" were the first words that took shape in his mind. "What have I said? and what did I mean by it? and what did she understand it to mean? Why did I not plead some sudden business or forgotten engagement, or go off without giving any reason—do anything, rather than place myself in such a position as I let myself drift into?"

He passed through the room, rapidly making his way among the crowd without seeing it; and the crowd, which, like others of its kind, looked so much and observed so little, made its way, if not without seeing, at least without particularly noticing him.

There was one person who took notice, but he was not in the crowd at that moment: it was Sherborne. He was standing behind the

door of a smaller drawing-room, where people were sitting down in twos and threes, oftener in twos, within the shadow of the ball-room. Another door opened into a conservatory, which opened on the terrace; and Moreton, desiring nothing distinctly, except to go anywhere out of the way, was hurrying as quickly as he could in that direction, when a sudden crowding in a narrow space, among the ottomans and sofas, brought him close to the spot where Sherborne was. A voice that certainly was Sherborne's, but a very unpleasant specimen of it, addressed itself to him slowly and with much ostensible deliberation, first in a short artificial laugh, and then in these words:—

“So you're off, as the man said to his head when he couldn't tell his own name.”

Moreton, pre-occupied as he was, and quite inattentive to everything except his own present position, started at the sound; but he answered without hesitation, “Yes, to-morrow,” and edging his way through the group of people that stood between him and the conservatory, walked on.

Between the small drawing-room and the conservatory there was a sort of ante-room, half sitting-room, half greenhouse, separated from the former by glass only, from the latter

by the wall of the house. It had two sofas covered with blue and white chintz, a non-descript vase or two, some Indian matting, and two heavy folding doors. As he went through this little room, which was now brilliantly lighted, he saw the Zouave talking very earnestly to the youngest Miss Arden—and so did Sherborne from the other door.

Passing through the conservatory and out upon the terrace, he gave one look at the lighted rooms, and turning away from the house, walked on slowly, in a direction which he took without choice or intention.

“Shall I go off at once,” he thought—“now, and not return to fetch my hat—and write some excuse, running the risk of whether they think me mad or anything else that I may seem?”

But he made no answer to his own question, though he asked it repeatedly in different forms of words, and put it to his will without words.

If Horace’s opinion be true, as no doubt it is generally, that crossing the sea does not enable us to leave our sorrows behind, the inference is, that a lonely stroll by very fitful moonlight could hardly be expected to have

a comforting influence over a man situated as Moreton was ; and, in fact, the farther he went, the more miserable he felt. The heavy mist, the dead stillness, and the sharp chill of the dew on the grass, emphasized and elaborated the impressions of the ball-room, epitomizing from time to time the whole subject in a series of propositions so rapidly that they were hardly distinguishable. For instance :—

“I had no right to say what I said to her, unless I had been justified in saying more. I shouldn’t have been justified, because I felt that—what *did* I feel about it ? that she would or would not ? I can’t tell. I feel that I wish she would, and that I fear she would not ; for whether she would and her father would not, or whether both she and her father would not—God help me ! If I were not a Catholic, and have consolations which unaided humanity dreams not of, I should go mad.”

Then, after a while, he made a great effort to think, if not to feel, more calmly ; and he thought in this manner :—

“Why am I so sure that it is impossible—if *she* would ? I don’t think her father is worldly, and I have now about a thousand a year—which is surely enough to live upon,

and I am quite as well born as they are, if that is of any use in these days. I am wrong, as well as a fool, to give it up till I have given myself the opportunity of being refused."

The idea of being supposed, even by himself hypothetically, to have shrunk from the risk of refusal, with a bare possibility of being accepted, made him turn round, look back towards the lighted windows, and form a sudden resolution to risk the refusal.

"If I fail," he said, "as of course I shall, this world can take nothing more from me; and, whatever humiliation the world may attribute to such a refusal, I offer it as my homage to her whom I have very unworthily loved. He shall have the opportunity of snubbing me, and of laughing at me civilly to himself for having exposed myself to the snub without any encouragement from her, or reason to expect any; and any one that likes may have the gratification of laughing at me. I will speak to him to-morrow morning, come what will. But I know too well what will come of it." He turned away from the sight of the lighted windows, and walked on, thinking aloud:—

"Yes, I know too well what will come of

it. But I will speak 'to 'her father to-morrow morning, nevertheless; for what sort of love is it that would allow pride, in any shape whatsoever, to come between itself and its object."

END OF VOL. I.



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